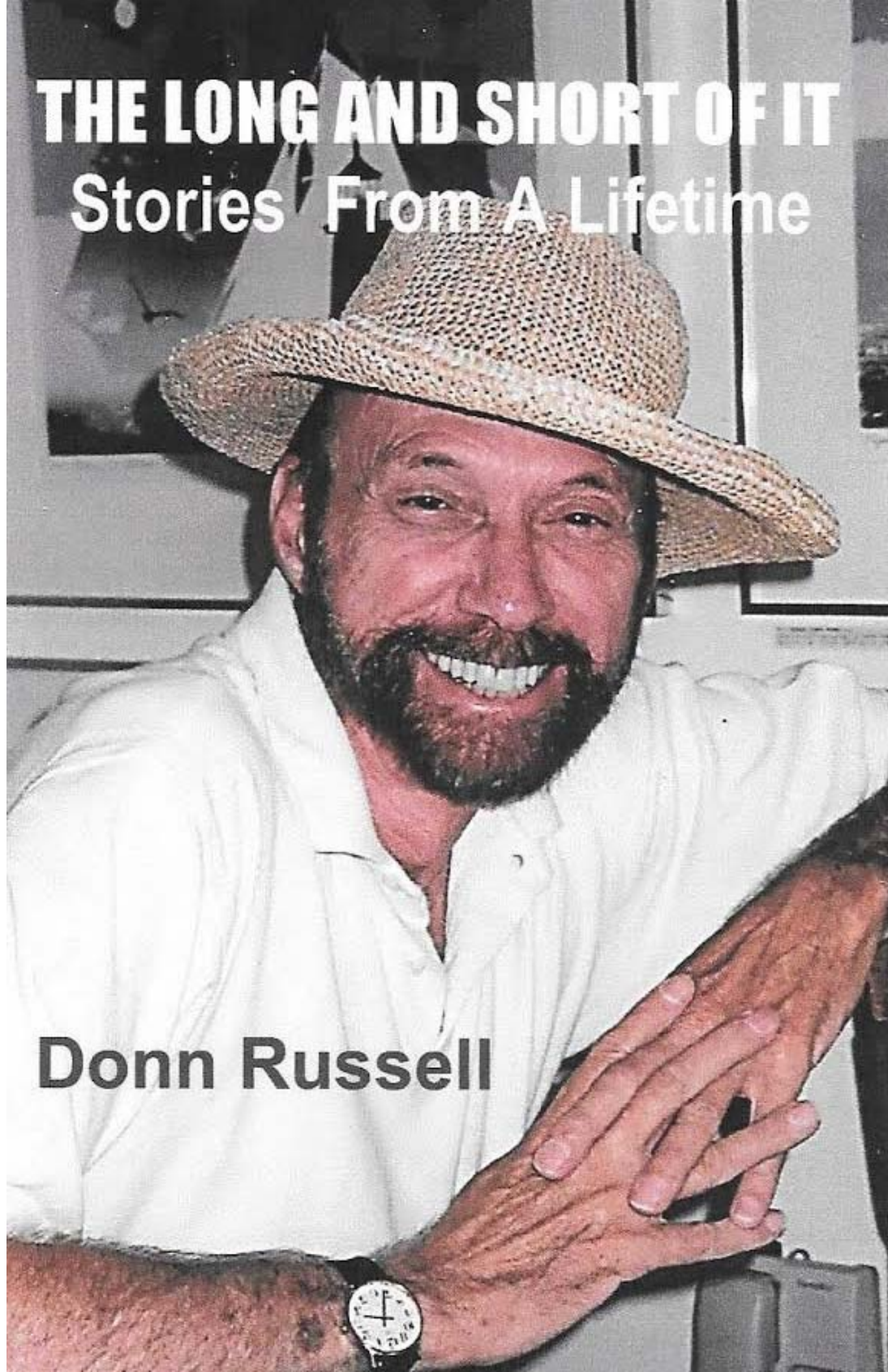


THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

Stories From A Lifetime

Donn Russell



THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

Stories From a Lifetime

by

DONN RUSSELL



THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

Stories From A Lifetime

by

Donn Russell

PAGE INDEX

1	A JOYFUL NOISE
9	ALL THE (ROAD) RAGE
11	A PENDANT WORLD
47	A SHORE THING
55	BON APPETIT
64	CATTLE CALL
80	DAYS OF MY YOUTH/ THE QUEST
92	DIVA
100	THE GIFT
108	THE GREEKS HAD(N'T) A WORD FOR IT
156	THE KITEMAN COMETH
168	MOSCOW MEMORIES
182	MURDER ON THE 6:15
188	I LOVE A PARADE
190	PEG
194	THE QUEEN AND I

SHORT TAKES

209	CELEBRITY STATUS
214	GETTING PINCHED IN THE ASTOR BAR
220	WHEN IN ROME
224	THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE
231	STILL(ER) WATERS RUN DEEP
238	MARGARITAVILLE
244	TURISTA
251	ARTHUR AND I:
251	PISSOIRS DE PARIS
253	SEVILLE-ITY
254	THE MONEY BELT
257	STAIRWAY TO BOUNTIFUL
261	SLEEPERS AWAKE
266	SCALL-OOPS
271	BIRDS OF A FEATHER
278	MISTER MALAPROP (aka Arthur)
291	A N.Y. XMAS
298	HITCHED, SORT OF
302	CHANGE OF LIFE: A Triptych
319	YOU'RE SO BALD, YOU'RE BALD
332	THAT ELUSIVE '15 MINUTES OF FAME'

To Arthur



Photo: John Lundvell

Donn Russell – First Art Exhibit 1949 – Family Homestead – Medway MA

A JOYFUL NOISE



*Bright-ly beams our Fa-ther's mer-cy
From His light-house e-ver-more...*

I was born into a family of compulsive hymn singers. Since the burnished November morning in 1924 in the little town of West Medway, Massachusetts, just west of Boston, when my father, Paul Belford Russell took my mother, Edna Susanna Larson, to be his lawfully wedded wife, none of their kin - his sisters Pearl, Grace, Janet and Madeline; and her sisters Mildred and Dagmar and brothers Wilbert and Stanley, nor any of their spouses - could remember a subsequent gathering of the clan for Sunday or holiday dinner that didn't include, after pie and coffee, a healthy exercising of the lungs around the piano. And they all lived near enough to each other to make them relatively frequent occasions, curtailed only slightly by gas rationing in World War II.

*...And to us He gives the keep-ing
Of the lights a-long the shore...*

Earliest recollections in the mid 1930s were of the men folk, sleeves rolled up and ties loosened, semi-circled around the upright and anxiously riffling hymnals while dishes were being cleared from the dining room. The scene was the same no matter whose house was visited. They all had uprights (tall) or spinets (low) in their parlors except Grace, a professionally trained mezzo, who rated a baby grand. My mother Edna, whose keyboard technique

was “no-frills standard” alternated as accompanist at those sessions with Dad’s eldest sister Pearl. My brother Art and I and attendant cousins, looked forward to Aunt Pearl tickling the ivories so we could mimic her from the kitchen. A formidable thickly-set woman (some said “bossy”), she had a stiff-armed approach to playing that attacked the keyboard in such a way that each note of a chord was struck slightly before the next from the bottom up, creating a lush ripple effect that turned the simplest song of praise into a continuous babbling brook of sound. With head back and bifocals in place she’d peer down past her nose at the propped up selections, then, barge-like, heave her shoulders side to side to mark time. We echoed the ripples with fingers and giggles across the oil-clothed table.

*...Let the low-er lights be burn-ing,
Send a gleam a-cross the wave....*

The men, locked in heads-together four-part harmony on the verses, formed the clasp of a necklace of brightly beaded womenfolk, strung around the periphery of whichever parlor on whatever chairs. Seated in Sunday best with aprons doffed and hands folded in comfortable laps, they added their voices at the choruses with lilting melody. We youngsters were encouraged to join in, but seldom knew the words or tunes. Or cared. Playing in the kitchen or out in the yard, however, we were always aware of the pervasive sounds, and somehow they seeped into our collective consciousness. Years later we cousins amazed ourselves at how much we retained. When our time came, a goodly number joined local church choirs just as their folks had.

*...Some poor faint-ing, strug-gling sea-man
You may res-cue, you may save.*

The settings changed but the scenarios never did: singing and chatting and singing again until the afternoons waned, mostly hymns but sometimes beloved old chestnuts from, say, Stephen Foster, a special favorite of Grandmother (Gram) Elizabeth if the visit was with one of the Russell family. She never sang along, but kept tapping one twiggy forefinger on the arm of her wingback and nodding approval. We thought she was *born* old. She had been wi-

dowed so long none of us children imagined she'd ever been married. It wasn't until much later we were told of the murder of her husband Percy, aged 44, while returning from Boston with his daughter Grace on the evening commuter train in mid-winter of 1922. Convinced he was the obstacle to marriage with her, a young suitor hopped aboard and shot him once in the chest, then her four times, the bullets lodging in a raised shielding arm. Crazed, he turned the gun on himself and died next day in ER of self-inflicted wounds. She survived, but abandoned operatic aspirations for a successful marriage that resulted in, among other things, that aforementioned grand piano (but no subsequent offspring to tinkle on it). She soloed in Boston choirs and oratorio groups until she in turn was widowed, and spent the rest of her very long, rather pinched life never discussing the tragedy.

*I come to the gar-den alone,
While the dew is still in the ros-es.....*

Grandmother, Gram as she preferred, on the other hand eventually grew to consider the incident a form of entitlement, widowhood giving her special status in the family and the world, with expectations of deferential treatment. One accustomed church pew became her acknowledged domain no one else dared occupy. Total strangers bowed respectfully in passing without knowing why, or offered an arm on the stairs. Her posture became straighter, her chin higher. She practiced speaking aloud to people in her head. To us cousins she seemed distant even when condescending to address us. She didn't have the slightest notion what we talked or thought about. Out of sight we'd mock her use of big words and airs, and joke that her bowlegs stopped at the hem of her skirt and didn't go all the way up. Eventually the two became our Queen Elizabeth and Princess Grace.

*....And the voice I hear, fal-ling on my ear,
The Son of God dis-clos-es....*

The Larson – my mother's – family was very different. Grandpa Axel with his trim cavalier's moustache and Grandma Susanna, all dark eyes and impish grin, had arrived separately from Sweden as teenagers and met singing in a church choir in Arlington just north

of Boston He was a master woodcarver by trade and was steadily employed creating intricate embellishments inside and outside structures in Harvard Yard for most of his life. She had been orphaned in Upsala and sent to live with her older cousin in Cambridge, who taught her rudiments of the Scandinavian cooking she was to become noted for. They owned a two-family city house and lived upstairs over daughter, Dagmar, her husband and their two daughters. They and the family of five they raised were mostly jolly, contented people with easy aspirations. There was a piano, of course – a spinet – and most of their entertaining around it was done evenings.

Aside from a driveway there was no real greenery outside for us to play on, so our visits with them were confined to the second floor dining and living rooms that memory rendered redolent of baking coffeebread and candle glow. The old couple sailed back to Sweden every two years with eldest daughter Mildred. We'd see them off on the *Stockholm* and greet their return (feigning delight at gifts like embroidered felt hats and lederhosen we would never wear or sheathed hunting knives we would never be allowed to).

*....And He walks with me, and He talks with me
And he tells me I am His own.....*

In summer the entire Larson tribe moved into a former sculptor's studio in a stand of pines with a two-story north window, sleeping balconies for us kids and a view out to sea beyond Kittery Point, Maine. A truly rustic rambling cottage, it boasted a water pump in the kitchen, a pull-chain toilet and - instead of a piano - an old-fashioned pump organ in the large "common room". It was my luck to be able to diddle on it at will all week when the only residents were the aunts and cousins, mainly occupied outside, and Grandpa and Grandma who spent the days cheating each other at Chinese Checkers or snoozing in front of the Franklin stove. The uncles arrived late Friday from Boston and drove back Sunday.

It was during those weekends, after clamming, hiking and swimming that serious hymn singing was resumed by all, barefoot and sunburned. Our mother Edna would bang out a wheezing accompaniment while her two sons, on our knees each side of the foot pedals, helped pump up and down with our hands on a stubborn instrument, ravaged by a century of neglect and briny expo-

sure.

*....And the joys we share, As we tar-ry there,
None oth-er has e-ver known.*

Often present those weekends were the grandparents' two change-of-life boys, Wilbert (Bill) and Stanley (Stan). They were so much younger than their three sisters they were almost like their own kids. Easy going, fun loving Stan was a commercial artist and engraver. (It was he who actually wax-engraved the plates for much of the music found in current hymnals and sheet music. His son David a generation later would form a male gospel singing quartet that traveled the west and recorded inspirational albums). Stan added his own sweet Segovia-like guitar riffs to Edna's wheezing. He was at an age when he strummed the thing constantly, night and day. Everywhere. His parents were too deaf or too engrossed to notice. Everyone else just rolled their eyes.

Older brother Bill was something else again. The first boy born in the family, he was "spoiled rotten". He had the best singing voice of all - a beautiful resonant baritone- and was in demand to host revival "sing-alongs" all over Bean Town. His followers claimed his charms could rouse the dead to song, the lame to dance. However, his charismatic talent came at a price. You name it: vanity, hypocrisy, mendacity, ill temper or just plain viciousness (offstage). It was after he once cajoled me - with praise for my own nascent fourteen year old vocal promise - into accompanying him in his van to chorus rehearsal at a large arena somewhere, that it was discovered his real object was to use me as a shill for luring underage sopranos to the back of the vehicle for a little divine guidance between sets, with me as lookout on the sidewalk, never daring to squeal to his wife at home with their two toddlers. (Years later she admitted, with a wink, knowing all about his philandering and using it to her own undisclosed advantages.) He was disliked as no other family member. By the time he retired to Florida with good riddance the only sibling still on telephone terms was Edna, his early potential compromised by a life of arrogant conceit.

Back to the early family get-together finales: coffee was served again after the last rendition of the afternoon (or evening) as a signal they were about to draw to a close and time to gather the kids and the coats. But not before one bonus performance was expected to wind things down. It had become a good luck tradition.

With me aged five and my brother two years younger, prodded to the center of the room by our stage mother, the ritual duet was begun (and to our mutual consternation still being demanded well into puberty for old times sake),

Performed together at the same time. Loudly!

Donnie, singing: *I am trav-ling on the Hal-le-lu-jah line, on the good old gos-pel train.*

Artie, backup, chugging: *Choo choo choo choo choo choo choo choo choo choo TOOT, TOOT!*

Donnie: *I am on the right track and I ne-ver will go back to the sta-tion of sin a-gain.*

Artie: *Choo choo choo choo choo choo choo choo choo choo choo choo TOOT, TOOT!*

And so it went for a few more stanzas until laughter and cheers drowned us out, our chubby cheeks tweaked and fair hair tousled by loving grownup hands. It made goodbyes happy endings, as it does here for memories of that bygone era when families still enjoyed joining together in mutual pastimes, in this case raising voices in song for the simple and wonderful joy of it. By the time the Second World War was over a fresh new era was dawning quickly, and singing old songs around old parlor pianos was already old.

“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye nation...” Psalms 100:1
Medway, MA November 1986

Anecdote:

It wasn't until 1970, when buddy Arthur Schaefer and I purchased a tiny shack on Nantucket Island and wrapped a two-story house around it, that the thought occurred to own a piano again like in the old days. It wasn't that music hadn't been a part of my life in the intervening years. During that war I was a teenage vocalist on a weekly radio program on WEEI Boston called *Youth on Parade*, and later spent two years as a musicology major at BU College of Music (the more I studied, the less I liked music, so quit). I remained no stranger to G clefs and keyboards, but my interests changed to painting and sculpture, with which I doggedly

did battle the rest of my life. Besides, a miniscule rent-controlled Greenwich Village artist studio was no place a piano of any dimension would fit comfortably (though our next door neighbor, a cabaret pianist, had a practice grand that filled an entire room; for drinks visitors reclined *under* it on cushions, Roman style). Pianos were scarce items on the island then, but spotting an ad tacked up in the local thrift shop offering a baby grand in good condition, I followed up. The address was on Main Street in the most easterly of three identical brick homes built in the whaling era by a ship captain for his three daughters. The present owners were named Fonda (not *that* Fonda). My mother Edna, who was visiting at the time, accompanied me up the steep front steps. A pull on the bell chord set off an echo of chimes inside that seemed to go on forever. Finally, after an extended interval, footsteps could be heard padding from the back of the house.

As they approached, the sound of doors slamming on both sides ricocheted down the central hallway. The front door was unbolted, opened a crack and an adenoidal teen voice said, "Whacha want?" Here about the piano for sale was my reply. "Oh." The door opened wider. Talking was a stout youth with the indefinite features of a worn bar of soap. Without more ado he pointed to one of the closed doors and yelled, "Maaaah!" A short shapeless woman with equally indefinite features opened it and asked, "You the one?" About the piano, yes, ma'am. Ascertaining that the lady with me was a relative, she led us to the shawl-draped mass in the middle of the gloom. The lid over the keys was down. Could we have a look at the keys? "Well, okay but don't touch 'em." Could I strike a chord for tone quality? "Once." Then she banged the lid down and crossed her arms, "Well, d'ya want it?" Yes. Sold. About getting the heavy thing moved, she suggested Myles Reese the trash collector. "Picks up garbage mornings. Then hoses down the truck and hauls good stuff afternoons." About tuning it, she indicated the piano had always been Carole Lombard's. Ask her. "Carole Lombard? You mean *the* Carole Lombard?" "Yep." I daren't ask more.

Sure enough, Myles Reese arrived as scheduled and his crew eased the behemoth into my living room and fixed the legs. The charge was by weight. Close scrutiny showed it was an Estey, circa 1930, in remarkably good condition. The ivories were all there, if a bit loose and yellowed. But mine! All mine! The finish was dull

but unscarred. and to think it had been Carol Lombard's. I could hardly believe it. Mom was invited to try it out first. She pulled up a rattan-seated Windsor and played from memory as I sang along – guess what? *The Old Rugged Cross*.

The next winter in New York I searched and found a terrific sepia Hollywood head shot of movie star Carol Lombard and a deco frame to enhance it, knowing they would look great atop the piano – *her* piano. Back on Nantucket the following May a friend called to say her piano tuner, a retired teacher, was there for the week and could also tune mine before she returned to Maine. I was delighted and when the knock came on my front door, I opened it to a lanky brillo-haired schoolmarm with owl glasses and tuning forks. "Hi," she smiled, "I'm Caroline Lombardo."

New York City, January, 1996



Photo: John Lundvell

Taking time out from my 'career' as vocalist on the popular CBS Radio show 'Youth on Parade' to render a few choice solos at Aunt Maddie's wedding in October, 1946. Seated at the keyboard is intrepid family accompanist Aunt Pearl

ALL THE (ROAD) RAGE

On Nantucket Island, when two locals in pickups pass each other on the road or across an inter-section, they often pause with left elbows out their respective windows, greet each other with a *wha's up?* and generally shoot the breeze for a minute or two, mostly about fishing or new carpentry jobs. If there is no traffic in either direction, off season say, that breeze-shooting might be extended, in which case it could turn into a substantial conversation. But in summer those extended talks might also occur and not for such congenial reasons, especially right in the middle of the intersections that are most clogged, for better or worse, with the fancy shmancy vehicles of off-islanders on holiday. It is roughly considered thereabouts a form of stick-it-to-em for being rich or famous – or *there*.

Midday one July at the height of the season, just such a scenario took place at one of the island's busiest spots, called Five Corners for good reason. Every one of the roads converging there was full of four-wheelers, with a few two-wheelers teetering along the curbs. Center stage was occupied by two passing muddy-bumpered pickups that had halted. Their drivers were conversing and gesturing in a louder than usual fashion, indicating they knew full well they had a captive audience all around.

A petite, thirty-ish pale blonde was first in line behind one of the trucks in a little white jeep. She wore a little white tennis outfit and visor. Next to her was a little pale blonde girl dressed the same. They both wore little white tennis shoes. The seats they sat on were white. There was a large white tote on the back seat. She viewed what was going on before her as a personal affront. She beeped her little white horn twice to no avail. She beeped it again. AND AGAIN. No response. She was beside herself. Grabbing the edge of the windshield for support, she dialed 911 on her cell for police, then resumed beeping.

At the fifth beep, the local in the truck facing her stuck his head out the window and drawled in mock exasperation, one palm up, “Hey, lady, where you *thank* you *ahhh*, New Yawk City?”

That was the last straw. She jounced up and down on her little white seat, screaming obscenities. The little pale blonde held her ears and whimpered. The little white jeep stalled. The vocal locals

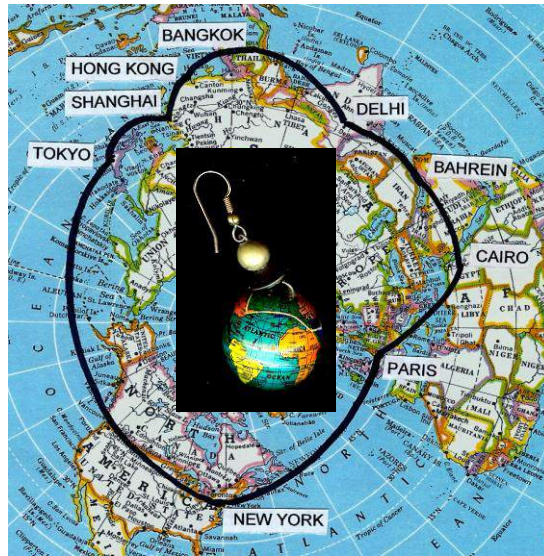
resumed gabbing. The pale blonde became so agitated by her own screaming that she half stood and with both elbows together came down once more as hard as she could on the horn.

That did it. The airbag exploded from the steering wheel, pinning her against the seat back and spewing puffs of grey amorphous stuff with it that momentarily engulfed her. It was definitely un-white and smelled awful. She gagged on the fumes. Before the bag collapsed all that could be seen was a pair of arms waving about as if signaling help from drowning. Her makeup smudged, her hair a mess, the pale blonde somehow extricated herself and ran around to check on the little blonde who was unharmed, but dusty and near hysterics. The two of them, their little white tennis outfits a horrid shade of airbag, huddled together on the sidewalk while the taller called for a tow.

By the time the summer rent-a-cops arrived on bicycles from her first call, the two trucks had long gone, leaving the dusty little white Jeep alone at the center. They rolled it to a curb, allowing some of the cross traffic to resume. Surprisingly, as the patiently waiting lines began inching forward again and the police quizzed drivers in passing, nobody seemed able to recall the license plate numbers, or makes, or colors of the muddy-bumpered pickups. Surprising indeed. On the other hand quite a few had satisfied little smirks on their faces as they swerved out and around the distraught vehicle. The wrecker came and hoisted it up, chained it down and asked the pale blonde if she wanted to ride to the repair shop or call a taxi. After one look at the inside of the wrecker's cab, she opted for a taxi. The wrecker shrugged and started up Mill Hill, the dusty little white jeep bobbing behind like a discarded plaything being returned to the toy bin. The pale blonde wiped the little pale blonde's face and hair with a no-longer-white hankie and then used it to wipe the surface of her no-longer-white cell phone before calling a taxi.

Traffic was getting back to normal at Five Corners, meaning steady. Drivers courteously took turns crossing by who went last. A few off-islanders might cheat by sneaking across behind a large SUV. But for the most part island customs prevail, including when two locals in pickups are passing each other and have something to say, they stop and say it. You don't like it? Well, you might consider the advice offered by bumper stickers all over the island: 'SLOW DOWN – YOU'RE ALREADY IN PARADISE'.

A PENDANT WORLD



A bauble was bought at a street fair in New York City in the spring of 1989. It was a sphere depicting the world in full color suspended from an earring hook and topped by a faux onyx disc and metal pearl. It had no mate and must have cost all of \$3. But it was intriguing and kept as a pocket talisman all summer, evoking and tempting far off places. A “wish” route was even drawn in white around it. The more it was discussed, the more interested Arthur and I got about circumnavigating the earth. It became really exciting when we decided to try to do it all in three weeks. Three weeks! In early September we contacted a Sikh professional travel agent in New York who specialized in round-world itineraries. He said it was possible only if we stuck faithfully to his plan and promised not to eat “anything ethnic”. We promised. In early October we flew out with the best of intentions (that, as everyone knows, often can and do go awry).

The last thing the pilot of the Gulf Air jet warned me was that after he made the emergency landing he could wait only long enough for me to deplane and the ambulance crew to carry Arthur off before he had to take off again. It was not a scheduled stop, and he could assist us no further. Once left on the tarmac alone in the middle of the night anything could happen to us since we were not welcome in that country. Hopefully the ambulance would be at the ready, but there were no promises. Be advised. He wished me the best and hoped we caught up with our luggage in New York.

Two stewardesses had literally been sitting on top of Arthur during the last hours of the flight. He had taken ill soon after leav-

ing New Delhi and lost consciousness, followed by uncontrollable convulsions. They had laid him across three seats with blankets that he continually threw off in his writhing until they held him down. Another stewardess was trying to calm me. It seemed strangely exotic to look over and see her and the others with short beige veils newly covering their faces below the eyes and neatly tucked back under their uniform caps, shades of *Scheherazade*. It briefly dawned on me this was no place women were allowed to go about freely. I feared we wouldn't be either. I grew terribly frightened and apprehensive. Everything was suddenly falling apart, and so late in our careers, to paraphrase Stephen Sondheim. (Arthur was 76, I was 60.) We were both seasoned travelers, but simply thought, well.....

Our impossible adventure had gone without a hitch until that last day in New Delhi. It had to. One missed flight, hotel booking or no-show limo would have meant instant disaster. But when we got to the airport for the flight to Cairo, we realized how vulnerable our situation could be. There were several hundred passengers milling about a vast hangar, all in states of unrest. Something was up. An official appeared and announced the aircraft was malfunctioning and a delay should be expected of at least 4 hours. The air in the shed was stifling and a little soft drink stand in one corner had long since sold its last bottled water and been abandoned. As the hours passed and the heat grew more intense, many in the crowd began screaming, in a Babel of languages, for someone to do something about the situation.

At last a harried officer arrived and, with mike in hand, assured us the airline was doing everything in its power to alleviate our condition. Before long several large vans drew up outside; long tables were set up; wait staff in white appeared; and platters of food were being set out, none of it labeled, so one took one's chances. Ignoring our Sikh guide's admonition, we lined up with everyone else and took what looked good. Unfortunately Arthur's taste in food ran to gooey whipped-top desserts, and he disappeared into them. I more modestly chewed – and chewed – a few strands of meat and dry legumes in front of me and let it go at that. Thankfully there was enough bottled water now for everyone. With the multitude sated, the officer said buses would soon arrive to take us to a new hotel still under construction at the other end of the air-airport. What we found there was an enormous elegant hotel in the

making. The great chandeliers in the lobby were still encased in plastic. There were padded sofas here and there under wraps, and a lot of folding chairs and ladders. Workers were still hammering and sawing.

Another airline employee, a sleek young lady this time, took the mike and told us that we could each have a private room to rest in and shower – but NOT TO DRINK THE WATER. As it turned out the room Arthur and I received was vast, dusty and empty except for one bare bed and a chair. And the air was stifling. The only window was sealed tight and, of course, the air conditioning had not yet been installed. We showered and, since there were no towels, dried stand-ing in the heat. Finding the surroundings unbearable, we donned our sweaty clothes again and joined the ever growing crowd back in the lobby. At least the vast doors were open there and afternoon breezes wafted some relief.

At dusk the plane was ready for departure. It took another hour for the buses to transport the passengers back across the field and get them properly ensconced. A great hurrah arose when we finally lift-ed off and flew into a breathtaking sunset. An hour or so later Arthur began feeling dizzy and ill internally, but didn't complain immedi-ately. It wasn't his nature to make a fuss about himself. But when his body caved over in a position too uncomfortable for sleep, I touched his arm and called to him. He didn't respond. I assumed the worst and went forward for help.

Two stewardesses returned with me, one with an aid kit. They determined he was still alive but not conscious and asked: Had he eaten something that didn't agree with him? I didn't know because when the passengers all crowded around the tables at the airport, we were separated and didn't meet up again until we got into our plane seats. He was still in convulsions and continued to perspire heavily.

The pilot was sent for and determined that, according to the regulations of his airline, he must make an emergency landing at the next available airport large enough to accommodate his plane. I may have been told the name of that next stopping place, but I was too upset to remember it at the time. The pilot went back to the cockpit to make arrangements. He didn't appear again until he brought the news about dropping us off on the tarmac. One stewardess was still kneeling and wiping Arthur's forehead while smoothing back his blond hair; the other was still holding down

his legs and keeping his body covered. They were told to prepare for landing, and it was then they affixed the veils.

It was pitch black when I was led to the front door to disembark after the craft landed. I vaguely remembered later looking out as I descended the staircase and seeing silhouettes of palm trees and beyond them distant glints of light on water. A desert type place. The stretcher carrying Arthur had been taken down already and immediately an ambulance appeared out of the darkness with lights flashing. Its crew quickly opened the back doors, placed Arthur on a gurney and signalled for me to jump in. I saw that the lettering on the doors read BAHRAIN and then something that resembled upside down script. The plane immediately taxied away.

None of the attendants spoke English, so we rode off in inky silence along the glittering water. Several times I tried to ask where we were, but the only answers were upturned palms. Arthur was still unconscious and writhing under the holding straps. Occasionally he moaned softly. I was in total confusion about our whereabouts – or anything. We had been bound for Cairo, but there was no indication of a large settlement anywhere in the immediate stillness. Bahrain. It didn't ring any bells.

After what seemed a small eternity, the ambulance turned a sharp right and there directly ahead of us was a dimly lit building with "Salmaniya - Bahrain Medical Center" in faded English above it. That gave me some hope that I might be understood inside. But that was not the case. The attendants wheeled Arthur into Emergency, indicating I should follow, and placed him on a palette in the corner of a room full of others, all occupied. I placed our two shoulder bags – the only luggage we could retrieve – against the wall beside him and looked around in the yellowish light. In my confusion what I took to be nuns in black habits turned out to be local nurses heavily veiled. None of them could – or would – speak English and completely ignored my entreaties. Two of them, however, approached Arthur, stripped off all his clothes (which we never saw again), cleaned him up and covered him with a sheet and walked away. Another appeared and jabbed an IV into his arm and also disappeared. It wasn't inserted correctly and in minutes his arm swelled like a balloon, causing him to groan loudly in pain, even though unconscious. Then I screamed for help.

An angry doctor in a grey suit and checkered headress barged in and demanded to know what the commotion was about. When

he saw we were not natives, he proclaimed in halting English between hateful clenched teeth that we were not welcome there. He looked down at Arthur's helpless condition and proclaimed the patient was not cooperating and both of us must be out of his hospital by 10am that same morning. (It was 3: something at the time.) If not, he would have the patient put out on the street.

He spewed the rest of his venom at the nurse who administered the IV, and told what seemed to be the head nurse to correct it. Then he stomped out, ruffling black robes and veils on the way.

I felt absolutely destitute. Arthur would at least have a place to sleep for the night. I had nowhere to turn. I only barely had learned the name of the country, knew nothing about communication or even what the currency was, or of a place to stay for the night. I was so exhausted from the ordeal that I went into a small toilet nearby and sat down with my head in my hands. The clothes on my body, which were all I had, were saturated with sweat and I started to shiver. I wrapped a discarded sheet around me and went back to Arthur. The IV had been corrected and he became quieted, thank God.

Spotting a scrap of paper left on his chest, I found scribbled on it what looked like a telephone number. A nurse across the ward motioned with her eyes (that were all that showed over her veil) to the instrument on the wall beside her. I saw that it was a black phone, and when she was sure I'd seen it, she silently slipped away. I raced to it and dialed the numbers from the scrap. It was answered by the night clerk at a hotel. He spoke British English. After hearing my tale of woe, he said he would immediately dispatch a taxi to pick me up and take me there. He also indicated that the American Consulate was nearby, and, although the consul was not present, someone from his office could assist me after the offices opened at 8am. I shed a tear or two of relief.

The taxi driver spoke some English and filled me in on our whereabouts during the half-hour trip to the hotel. I was on the island of Bahrain, the largest of a small archipelago just off the eastern edge of Saudi Arabia and just north of Qatar, a much larger island, all in the Persian Gulf across from the then bellicose country of Iran. It had a constitutional monarchy, with a king whose official name was too long to remember. His palace, one of many, was near the hotel. The monetary system centered on the *dinar*, the language was Arabic, and the main religion was Islam. I was

almost lulled to sleep by the the driver's droning litany, but happy he was a school teacher by day and had afforded me a crash course in a place I never wanted, but was forced, to be.

The Gulf Hotel Bahrain was a sumptuous pile of concrete and glass nestled in a flourish of palms, with a side glance at the Persian Gulf. I had to run in and change dollars to dinars to pay the driver. Back at the front desk was the young man to whom I spoke by phone from the government hospital, so there was no need to repeat my tale of woe. He took my passport and handed over a key, assuring an 8am call, only a few hours later, to get to the consulate. Too tense to sleep, I lay fully dressed in the dark, reliving the recent nightmarish events until the wake-up ring.

I arose, doused my head and tried smoothing out my only shirt and pants in an attempt to look presentable. A young woman at the consulate immediately called the American Mission Hospital and put me through. The kindly voice on the other end listened to my story and said that an ambulance with attendants and a doctor and nurse would be at the government hospital at 9 sharp to pick up Arthur. There was only one stipulation, she added apologetically: I must have \$500 in cash in hand, the reason being that lately so many young hippies had used the facility and left without paying their bills, that it was now necessary to insist on a prior deposit. I agreed gladly.

True to her word there was a sleek new ambulance and attendants at the door of the old hospital on time, all smiling for once. No sign of last night's grim practitioners. Arthur, wrapped in the same sheet as before, was awake but looking weak and bewildered. En route I was told that we were headed for a private hospital formed in the last century by a Dutch Reform missionary sect with an excellent reputation, and not to worry, he was in good hands. When we entered the spotless facilities with sunlight streaming and friendly nurses in white scurrying about, it was as if the sky had opened and a choir of angels (suitably veiled) was rendering the *Hallelujah Chorus*. A young Swiss doctor took Arthur in tow, and advised me to go back to the hotel and get some rest. I did just that, sleeping until the first amplified call to prayer from a nearby minaret at 4 am next morning. (There would be five in all in the course of each day.)

My perils were not over, unfortunately. At the front desk another gentleman, handing back my passport, said that since I had

no visa to be in the country I must report every morning for a government pass good for a day. I went as instructed to a depressingly typical municipal office to wait in an immigration line on the second floor for the document. As I waited, any number of families and older citizens – the women in head-to-toe black *abayas*, the men in *thobes*, long white shirts that reached the floor, and white or red-and-white checkered headdresses, *ghutras*, crowned by circlets of doubled black cord – pushed their way in front of me and even motioned for others behind to join them. I was always the last to be interviewed before noon closing time. I didn't dare – or know how – to complain. It was somewhat amusing, however, to watch the rows of cubicles with clerks in their *thobes* and *ghutras* seated cross-legged on swivel office chairs, darting back and forth with only the skirts dangling below the seats, like a platoon of amputees.

I would then go to the hospital to visit Arthur. The doctors didn't know what was wrong with him, but surmised it was an amoebic disorder of some sort. Since they couldn't tell which sort, they pumped him full of antibiotics and fed him only liquids for several days. I was told that because of his age and weakened state, it would be at least a week before he would be able to travel again. But in a day or two he began to resemble a paler version of his old self after orderlies sat him up in bed, shaved him and tamed his unruly shock of fair hair. He had difficulty speaking, but was able to flash his boyish gap-toothed smile that indicated things were looking up. They found it hard to believe he was 75.

My immediate concern was clothing. I had nothing but what I wore off the plane and Arthur had everything confiscated at the old hospital including shoes. We measured Arthur's waist for pants size with a length of string. I found my way to the central marketplace. It was high noon and an amplified call to prayer from a *muzzah* in a nearby minaret sent women scurrying indoors and men falling to their knees in response. Buses stopped mid-street while passengers (male only) filed out and spread their prayer rugs along the edges of the sidewalks, facing Mecca. All business halted. I was stopped in my tracks by a policeman who gestured I was not to move until he indicated so. I learned later that walking in front of a praying man would vitiate his prayer. In an adjoining alley were four women in black with, instead of veils, large black plastic masks that resembled beaks jutting out from their faces. They could

speak and see only through the middle slits. What seemed like a weird masquerade was, it turned out, everyday outer wear for certain ultra-strict sects. But hulking in the shadows they looked like giant scary crows. (It was said there were “morals police” prowling everywhere, making sure women also covered their necks, wrists and ankles in public at all times, as decreed in the Koran.)

When praying ceased and the street came alive again, I easily found everything I needed except a cap to protect my rapidly thinning pate from the intense desert sun. The indigenous didn’t wear caps. In a secondhand booth there was a battered khaki one with US ARMY on it. I bought it but soon had regrets. Wherever I went in it there were unkind glares and muttering. I felt naked. Except for trips to Immigration and the hospital, I decided to keep to the hotel. There was no further impetus to explore the flat dusty island – exotic to some, home to others, but not my kind of place.

The Gulf Hotel was air-conditioned and spacious. Having developed a mild *turista*, I ate lightly in the main dining room, but enjoyed taking in the surroundings. Diners –all male – frequented it in their *thobes* and *ghutras*, sometimes sitting in twos, holding hands across the tables like lovers. Those same men could be seen poolside outdoors where they changed into miniscule black briefs in cabanas, then swam and lolled together in the shade on double recliners. Likewise the same guys could be seen in front of the hotel at other times, fully accoutered, assisting their several wives, who generally remained sequestered in elegant upstairs suites (often, it was said, in the latest Parisian couture), into waiting limousines. The ladies might be head-to-ankle in black *abayas*, but as they stepped in, my artist’s eye caught glimpses of their feet intricately tattooed with colorful flowers and birds in backless high heels.

With amusing digressions like that and the need to be within firing range of a loo, I took to lolling about, myself, thinking back over the more pleasurable moments leading up to this, and there were many.

My brother and I were several years apart in grammar school, but we had a mutual interest in geography, especially place names. When the lights were turned out in our bedroom at night, instead of counting sheep to get to sleep we lay in our separate twin beds and

took turns pronouncing aloud the names of the most exotic places we could think of in the world, each trying to outdo the other: Karachi, Singapore, Tahiti, Bangladesh, Hoboken. In much the same way Arthur Schaefer, my long-time buddy and business partner, and I made up a wish list of faraway places to visit. We had already done most of Europe, the islands of Greece, Mexico, Russia, etc. But now we wanted to take in the Far East and Asia too, so we hit on a round-the-world trip and the challenge of doing it in three weeks.

Our Sikh travel broker in Manhattan – a true magician – mapped out the itinerary, ordered all the airline tickets, arranged for a car and driver at every stop, hotel rooms, and, as an added fillip, some granola bars for the long stretches between meals. He admonished us again not to be tempted into trying ethnic dishes en route, saying that examples of any of them could be found and probably better in Manhattan, so to save experimenting until we returned and could better handle any problems. (Little could we have known...) The travel plan was: carry-on luggage only, no cameras, no commercial tours, and no shopping except for one item alone – expensive and meaningful – that we both felt would represent the spirit of the entire adventure later on.

Off we flew, then, at high noon on wings of Northwest Air, soaring up over Canada and Alaska, then down the North Pacific Ocean and into the Sea of Japan, arriving fourteen hours later in Tokyo's Narita airport. We were arriving at the very height of Japan's economic bubble of 1989 (it began to crash soon after). In fact it had been quite a year all around: Emperor Hirohito, scourge of the West and living god to his subjects, died after 62 years on the Chrysanthemum Throne; the Nikkei Stock Exchange hit an all-time high, with tales of brokers sumptuously dining on gold-sprinkled food with 14 karat chop sticks; property values in Tokyo rose to \$139,000 per square foot, and the Yomiuri Giants had a championship season. The inflation was apparent to us the moment we stepped out of our midtown hotel and began strolling. A nearby fruit stand boasted oranges for \$30 - each, one pear for \$40 and a single cherry for \$5. There were melons lovingly swathed in purple tissue for \$100 apiece, and strangest of all, cubic watermelons, grown in glass boxes so they would pack easily and not roll, selling for more than that. Suddenly our granola bars seemed downright tempting.

Our driver in Tokyo was a fastidious little man in a visor cap who drove with snow white gloves and cleaned the car windows at every stop. The back seat had two crocheted antimacassars as head rests that we didn't dare lean against for fear of soiling them. There wasn't much of interest for us in the city aside from the royal palace and Kabuki Theatre, however. The Ginza theatrical district, the equivalent of New York's Times Square, was gaudier and more blatant than I remembered, and only relevant for CEO dining and entertainment. I'd visited Japan almost exactly thirty years earlier to sketch and paint and learned the reason for arriving in Tokyo was to leave it for somewhere else as soon as possible. Also I'd forgotten from the earlier visit how annoying the sounds of the *pachinko* parlors could be. A national pastime, they were ubiquitous and earsplitting. A cross between slots and pinball machines, they could now be found on every street and in most shops, including the one next door to our hotel. The name itself imitated the noise they made in higher decibels. Besides, Arthur, an avowed gardener, was most interested in seeing Japanese gardens and landscapes, and aside from those within the royal confines, there was a paucity of great ones in the center of the city. However, Tokyo *was* the right place to depart in style because of the famed Bullet Train.

The *shinkansen* or Bullet trains remained wonders of mid-20th century engineering. Built like their name suggested, they traveled at 200 kilometers per hour and took only three hours to Kyoto, an ancient capitol of Japan nestled in a hollow surrounded by the craggy mountains revered from early artist Hokusai's prints. On the ride up to our hotel, with fog meandering through a stand of scented pines on the left and low overhung structures to the right little larger than doll houses, with rice paper windows and doorways overhung with flapping blue valances just low enough to require bowing on entering, Arthur pronounced Kyoto his kind of place. It helped that everywhere one looked was a perfect backdrop for Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, his favorite opera.

We had chosen to stay in the area called Gojo Rakuen (5th Street Paradise), a former Geisha district that included a school that had trained many of the most prominent Japanese men's wives who were all ex-geishas. When I was staying at my brother's home in a Tokyo suburb thirty years earlier, his maid Iishi told me of her sister's life as a geisha at the school. One incident remained in my

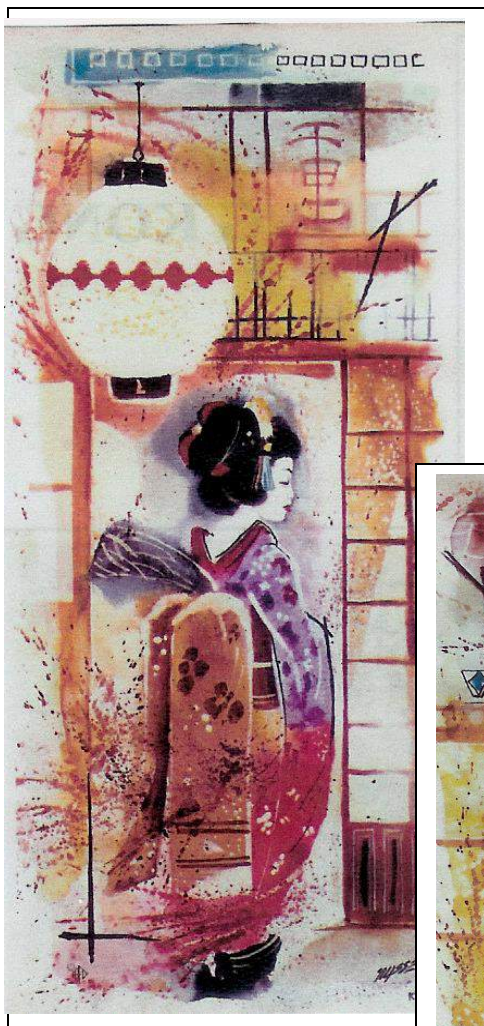
memory to relate to Arthur: at a certain celebration all the geishas carried paddles with depictions of the very costumes they were wearing, using the same fabrics. In a sort of badminton game played in the local streets, the losers had their stark white faces blackened by the victors as they paraded the narrow streets to drum beats and raucous cheers. When I left my brother's, Iishi ran out to me with a purple and gold wrapped package. In it were her sister's (losing) paddle and a pair of shuttlecocks. Having them mounted in a shadow box frame back in New York and conspicuously hung, I enjoyed the show-and-tell for many years.

Gojo Rakuen was a microcosm of the old Kyoto itself. Artists and artisans shared side by side tiny work shops crafting paper lanterns, parasols,

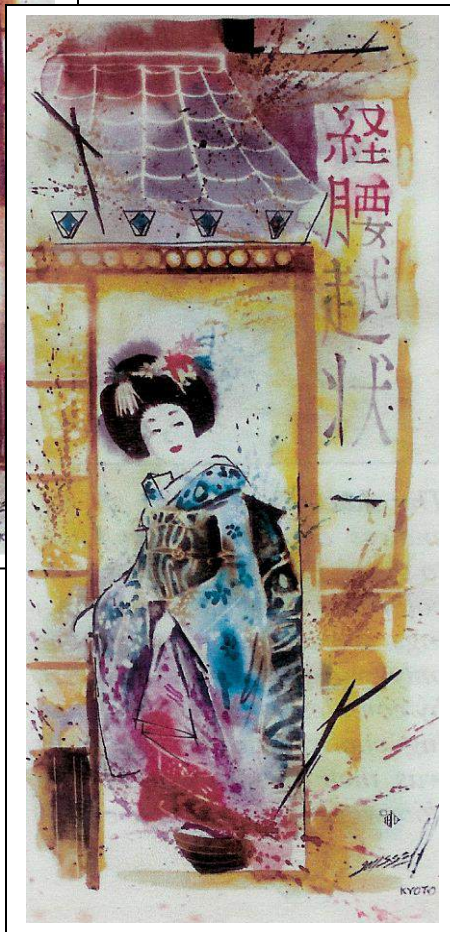


bamboo items, carved religious objects and pottery, interspersed with tea houses that catered to an ever aging clientele. Geishas were rarely seen on the streets except at dusk as they quietly shuffled off to work in their finery, past the work place that manufactured the original Nintendo games. Several blocks from our inn was a tall out-of-place white structure that turned out to be the parking garage headquarters of a local chapter of Yakuza, Japan's equivalent of the Mafia. The members even dressed like gangsters out of 1930s American movies and drove large ominous-looking cars. By the usual extortion and graft they kept the streets quiet and "protected" businesses and home owners, so were grudgingly tolerated.

Nearby were two religious centers – one Shinto and one Buddhist. All Japanese were born Shintoists and in life appealed to those shrines for wealth, health and good fortune. But Todai-ji Temple, the local shrine only required that individuals "live very clean lives and always know how to enjoy *sake*". That was evidenced by the barrels of sake always stacked below an overpowering roof shaped like a half open upper eyelid with turned up corners.

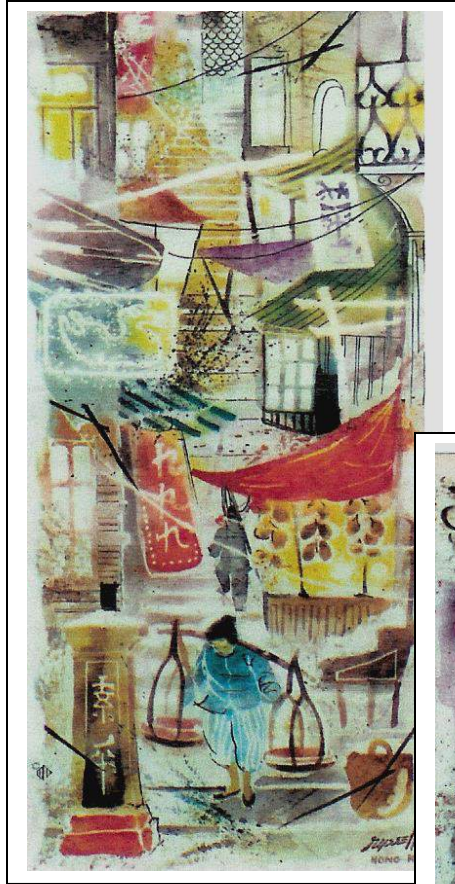


kyoto

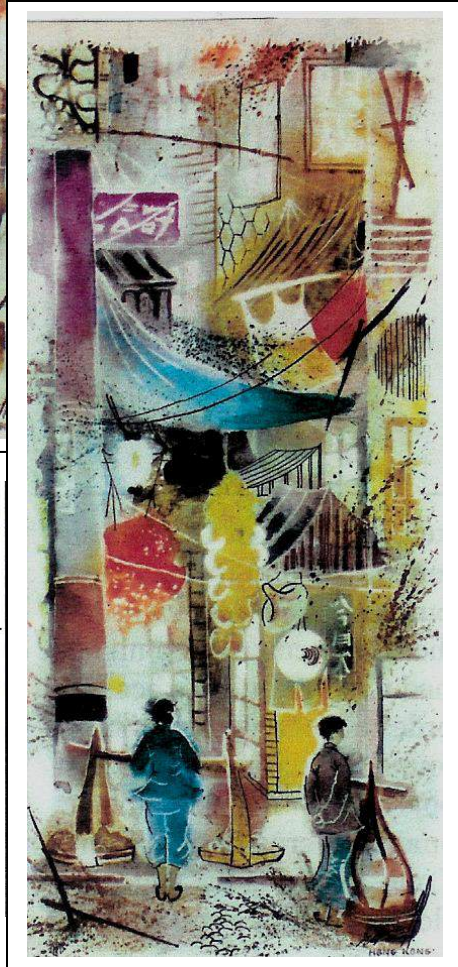


Sketches made of Geishas on their way to and from the tea houses in *Gojo Racuen* sector where they entertained nightly. I had to work quickly because hordes of school kids gathered around, jockeying for the best spots to view my sketchbook, sometimes crowding in front of me, blocking the sight, but seldom uttering a sound.

HONG KONG



The old city had no streets, but endless ascending stairs filled to the roofs on both sides with colorful merchandise and awnings. Yoked baskets were the only way goods got delivered, by countless pushing and shoving coolies whose sole interest was their destinations. I hid in doorways to capture the chaos.



motion exercise popular in the Orient. Behind them large buildings of every architectural period rose into a modest skyline.

China's largest city was there strictly for business, of whatever kind. Businessmen with brief cases went in and out of hotels and office structures like automatons. The modest hotel we were booked into had a lounge area with a pianist knocking out American pop classics all day and evening to no one's apparent notice. Salesmen of every nationality huddled in small intense groups pushing their products. Nanjing Road, leading from the Bund, was the shopping mall to end all shopping malls, with everything Made In China, of course. Unsuspecting foreign tourists were especially vulnerable to the road hawkers who, once shown the slightest glimmer of interest, stuck to them like flies.

As an artist, I would have painted the city battleship grey. The only bright spot was the Jade Buddha Temple with its shocking saffron walls beneath the usual overhanging upturned eaves. Its name derived from the huge collection of jade Buddhas brought from Burma (Myanmar) in 1882. But we learned that viewing so many sculptures of the same subject could make the eyes glaze over as it did observing a day of Madonna and Child paintings in Florence. Its main claim to fame was that in the Communist takeover it wasn't destroyed because the resident monks plastered Mao posters all over its doors and the red guards didn't dare violate them. Besides, the threat of rain became the real thing and forced us back to our hotel lounge and more best-of-Broadway medleys.

Foul weather continued next morning when we boarded the rather quaint train for the trip northwest to the little city of Suzhou, which was the reason for flying into Shanghai in the first place. Each seat back was adorned with a crocheted antimacassar and the conductors wore white gloves like back in the Tokyo taxi. By the time we reached Suzhou an hour or so later, the rain had slackened off but the sky remained overcast for the entire visit. No matter. The city, that lay in the Yangtze Delta between the Yangtze River and Lake Taihu, was often referred to as the oriental Venice for its many canals and waterways. But there the comparison ended. The main attraction was its many truly beautiful classical gardens, sixty of them kept intact and several in world listings. All of them were basically grey.

The difference between Japanese and Chinese gardens, we found, was that in Japan nature was captured in miniature with in-

scale pavilions and tea gardens, whereas the Chinese gardens integrated man-made buildings and the natural surroundings with equal importance. The gardens of Suzhou also incorporated locally mined grey porous rock formations, whose anomalous shapes defined the overall designs, especially around ponds and atop high mounds. The first garden we sought out was smallest and regarded by some as the most perfect, The Garden of Master of Nets (Wangshi). We first learned of it – and Suzhou – on frequent visits to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, where a replicate section was constructed on the second floor as the Ming Hall Garden in 1979. It afforded a quiet respite from the distractions of the other departments. The original, dating from the Song Dynasty, 960-1279, reflected life in a feudal society and got its name from the lowly government official who supposedly began it in a moment of bureaucratic frustration, saying that he would rather be a fisherman than a bureaucrat. The luxury here was the ability to see the entire array of vistas from one point that saved neck swiveling – and shoe leather. Memorable were place names such as The Pavilion of the Moon and Wind, on an island in the pond accessed by a bridge only 10 inches wide.

Since 42% of the city lay under water, road travel could be precarious. Most traffic was by three-wheeled pedicabs or bicycles. We hired a driver and one of the rare autos (of classic dynasty itself) to make the most of our stay. It led us to the largest garden, The Humble Administrator's Garden, dating from the Ming Dynasty. Much larger and far more inclusive, it boasted a huge central pond and island and pavilions with ornately carved eaves whose ends scooped higher than their central peaks. Nearby was a tall octagonal pagoda that could be seen from everywhere. The garden was named for another government servant who, after retiring, decided to spend the rest of his life building a garden. Over the centuries it grew to include more pagodas, a small forest, yellow rock "mountains" and water features such as lotuses and enormous gold fish (*koi*) and pond fowl. All breathtaking in detail, it proved repetitious and somewhat tiring in excess. The verdict: Japan's elegantly austere gardens were more our style.

Learning that Suzhou was also the main center for silk making in the Yangtze Basin, we cleared our palates with a side visit to one of its prominent studios, taking in the process from silk moths (not worms) eating mulberry leaves, to forming cocoons, to boiling

them to release the threads, to the weaving, etc. In the final workshop artists were making silkscreen prints on, guess what? Silk. It was especially interesting to me since I had already embarked on a career in screen printing myself (on paper) a decade earlier and was eager to check out the competition.

The drive back to the train depot occurred at the height of rush hour, and our little auto was over-whelmed by such a horde of bicyclists swarming in all directions that the driver was forced into the entryway of a nearby temple to escape the onslaught. Inside we caught sight of a bronze Buddha with an ominous looking swastika on its body. Taken aback momentarily, we were relieved to be told that the swastika was an ancient mystic symbol common to all world cultures. Its four equal bent arms pointed counterclockwise. The same design in reverse (pointing clockwise) was the one adopted as the despised and infamous Nazi emblem of World War II. Still, it was sobering. When the traffic eased we made it to the train, our thoughts very much our own, thence to Shanghai for the (supposed) three hour flight to Hong Kong.

Due to inclement weather the plane was late arriving at Hong Kong International, but our appointed greeter was there anyway. A pleasant middle-aged British schoolmarm, she efficiently maneuvered her car out into the night traffic headed for Kowloon, the mainland district where most hotels were located and from where ferries, the only means of passenger transportation, endlessly plied back and forth to terminals on Hong Kong Island. On the way we learned she was on a committee to welcome the British Royal Yacht *Brittania* in two weeks, carrying Prince Charles and Princess Diana for a first visit to Britain's smallest colony. The yacht was expected to dock at Queen's Pier directly in front of City Hall. She was to be in charge of dishing out local historical facts to the royal couple if called on and had been boning up for weeks. She passed on a couple anecdotes en route, including one from Queen Victoria's diary of 1841 that read, "Albert is much amused at my having got this little island of Hong Kong." Since the old queen was famous for "we are not amused" retorts, the revelation was funny.

I had visited it on my earlier trip to the Orient in 1959 and wondered how it may have changed in the meantime. Looking across the bay to the island at night was certainly still one of the most spectacular sights imaginable. Lights of all colors blinked from the skyscrapers – new since my time – and cruise ships anchored a-

alongside with myriad lanterns strung up and across their masts, elongated and shooting sparks over the inky water below. Victoria Peak in the distance was cut off midway by clouds, but tiny amber-lit cable cars could be seen inching up and down its length. I was glad Arthur could see it at night because in daytime it was not all that breathtaking.

Next morning we set out, after an English breakfast, by ferry-boat from Kowloon. Since my last visit Honk Kong had certainly grown – up if not out. Tall glass-enclosed commercial buildings rose around the base of Victoria Peak, the largest hill, hiding all but the top of it. In Hong Kong Harbor, where a permanent floating village of hundreds of sampans and junks once bobbed cheek-by-jowl, obliterating any glimpses of the fetid water beneath them, there were now so few they could be counted handily. It almost seemed local authorities had “planted” them there for atmosphere. But once stepping onto the main thoroughfares, it was clear that the island had lost none of its population – reportedly five and a half million souls – nor its teeming vitality and fascination.

On the ferry ride I told Arthur one of my earlier experiences up one of the step-streets we were approaching. I had decided what I really wanted was a man’s mandarin style long silk gown called a *changshan*. With a business card from my hotel I made my way up a number of long flights of stairs, which most streets actually were, looking for the address on the card printed in Chinese. With help I approached a low doorway and was told to go through to the door in the back and rap on it. The room that I had to cross was so dark it took a minute or so to get acclimated. Then all along the walls I perceived what looked like bodies reclining on shelves. There was an acrid-sweet smell I couldn’t identify. Gingerly I reached the rear door by the cracks of light around it and rapped.

A moon-faced elderly man with a tape measure around his neck opened it and asked “What want?” I showed him the back of the card on which a hotel clerk had indicated in Chinese what I wanted. Without speaking further, he began measuring me head to toe and across the shoulders. He then took out a large portfolio showing samples of silk material. I chose a dark grey. He opened his jacket, pointing to the lining and held up three more samples. I chose black. On the card he jotted down a price in US dollars. I nodded okay. He put out his palm. I paid. He said “T’mowo, sane tine.” I looked at my watch and okayed again. That was the ex-

tent of it. I made my way back through the thick gloom without looking around. Outside I checked the locale for landmarks and went on my way.

Next morning at the appointed time I returned, repeated the process and found the tailor waiting. I tried on the *changshan*. With no mirror, it felt all right, if a little tight across the chest. It fastened up one side to the right armpit, then across the chest to the throat at a stand-up collar. The length to the floor was fine. The tailor folded the gown, wrapped it in silver-printed paper and twine, and passed it over with a little nod. Crossing the darkness I noticed what seemed to be the same scenario and smell. Back out on the step-street I was stopped by two waiting British police officers in white spats. Politely but firmly they asked what I was doing inside. It seemed someone in a neighboring shop saw me and reported it. Did I know that what I was entering was an opium den? I confessed I wondered at the supine bodies and odors, but was so focused on the *changshan* I didn't think much about it. No, I didn't realize what it was, officer.

Asked to accompany them to their station, I complied hesitantly. Fact was I was scared stiff. The Hong Kong Central Police Station, built in 1864 according to its cornerstone, was one of those huge imposing British Colonial era showplaces with Doric columns and façade that was designed to intimidate and show who was in charge. It certainly did with me. Inside I was questioned about recent activities as my bundle was carefully examined. An international file was investigated. There was a short dossier on me since I had been visiting my brother in Japan and he was working for the US government and records were kept of all such employees in the Orient and their visitors. Eventually nothing untoward was discovered, and I was set free with an admonition to stay clear of opium parlors "whilst" in Hong Kong. I promised I would. The upshot of the tale was that when I took it back to New York after several more months of travel, the *changshan* turned out to be too tight for real comfort, but it was fun to don occasionally to impress visitors, letting the side slits fall away as I sat down, revealing the underlining with a ferocious little dragon embroidered in one corner. Eventually it went to the Salvation Army, like most things that seem appropriate abroad and ridiculous at home.

Arthur and I walked past the same (unchanged) Police Station and up the few step-streets we could manage at our age and con-

dition. One overhead sign had: YEAR OF THE SNAKE: Will get Along With Ox and Rooster But Must Avoid The Pig. It read like a fortune cookie. On many walls were scrawled sympathetic memorials to the Tiananmen Massacres in Beijing that spring. They affected local residents greatly since the British government had promised to give over its rule to China in nine years, and there was uncertainty at what might happen to them in such hands. Everywhere we went there were posters and protest parades strangling the already hectic traffic situation. But one had to realize that Hong Kong, for so many years balanced precariously yet successfully between East and West, was understandably anxious over the impending takeover.

Having had our fill of herbal medicines, dried seafood, fragrant soups (we found that the delicacy called bird's nest soup was made from the saliva of a special species of sparrow), flower stalls, lotus seed cakes, and endless "antique shops with real jade" for sale, we opted for a tram ride up the Peak (Victoria). The day was clear and the panorama from the top was, as advertised, "All Around You". Looking out to the China mainland were the hills that had fascinated centuries of artists, and seemed to me, in their soft rising and falling like the breasts of recumbent maidens. It was indeed sad to look down again at the harbor so bereft of the ubiquitous sampans and junks. Where did they all go?

Back to the base of the Peak we decided to go from the sublime to the ridiculous and tour Tiger Balm Gardens – a tourist attraction since 1935. Built by Aw Boon Haw (The Tiger) who made millions peddling his Tiger Balm Ointment (currently \$5 HK), it was a cross between kitch and art, with emphasis on kitch. One could stroll among his plaster dragons and other Chinese animals, faux fountains and phony waterfalls, caves and grottos, all encompassing a palatial Classical Chinese Renaissance mansion with a 165-foot white pagoda. (Believe it or not he built two more, in Singapore and Fujian.) But the mansion housed, surprisingly, one of the finest collections of jade in the world – no kitch. Word was that he had sold the property to a high rise bank that promised to keep the gardens intact. It was also said his early influence in getting the government to stop ivory sales led to its ban in 1989. Unfortunately Hong Kong by then had become the international center for illegal ivory trade and local – and foreign – retailers simply labeled it "bone" and, with a wink of the eye, sold it anyway. As one astute

observer noted, mixing arrogant English and superior minded Chinese (who in some ways were the shrewdest capitalists) and Hong Kong was what you got. Like mixing cigarettes and alcohol, the effect was multiplied. It remained to be seen how Hong Kong would fare ruled by China.

Many of the “arrogant British” bathed at the beautiful crescent-shaped Repulse (named for a ship) Bay near Kowloon on the mainland, and as a farewell gesture to them and Her Majesty the Queen, we were driven out to have a last look on the way back to our hotel. No one was swimming in October, but it was still quite a sight with its famous lifeguard station built like an ornate Chinese pavilion and overview of Hong Kong harbor at sunset. Victoria’s Albert should well have been much amused.

We departed at 5:30 am next morning for the three hour flight to Bangkok, Thailand. Our New York agent often booked us on off-peak runs like that to save money and precious daylight time for seeing sights. Arriving at Don Muang Airport about 9:30 am, we found Bangkok sweltering. I’d read that it was only 14 degrees north of the Equator, but never expected the intensity of the blast of hot air that greeted our arrival. It was literally breath-taking. Reaching the area in the terminal where our local guides were supposed to be waiting, there were only empty desks and no one but a floor sweeper to question without success. It was Sunday morning and, it seemed, most of the city was still asleep.

Eventually an apologetic driver appeared and indicated we had to wait a few minutes longer for the woman to show up who was to be our guide. She was an hour late, with the excuse that she had a bad cold and felt poorly (in all that heat?). A young/old/ thin creature with little personality and fake lashes, she continued theatrically coughing and spitting into a handkerchief all morning. We were well aware of Bangkok’s notorious reputation for easy sexual practices, and decided she probably took us for two elderly gents out after an early hanky-panky threesome, so she was pretending illness to avoid putting out but still getting paid. We smiled to each other in the back seat every time she heaved and hocked. She had no idea how much we *didn’t* want to have anything to do with her, but it made for informative back seat banter on the ride from the terminal to town.

We had learned that massage parlors polka-dotted all Thailand were two kinds – upstairs and down. If one was downstairs in a

shop open to the street and the attendants were beefy farmers' daughters in white coats, you could get a bona fide neck rub; if wispy things wearing evening dresses and too much makeup at midday yelled, "Hello handsome," and offered to lead you upstairs, chances are you'd get a massaged wallet and a probable roughing up. There were usually three types of men seen around the red light districts: sexpats, 50-ish fat guys with arms around girls too young to be their daughters; ladyboys (*kathoeys*), usually in drag, sometimes very convincing with prominent breasts and padded hips, but detectable by checking Adam's apples (real women don't have 'em); and expats, notably mercenaries, misfits and missionaries. The business of sex had taken on a whole new deadly dimension by 1989. AIDS. First diagnosed and given its name in 1982, it had already become a huge problem in Bangkok and all of Thailand. We read in a local newspaper a recent study had been made of young (legal) male prostitutes in a northern province and found that almost half of them were HIV positive, and almost none bothered to insist their customers use protection. Legal prostitutes (male and female), in Bangkok at least, had to be eighteen, have periodic physicals, and hand over their drivers' licenses or passports at the desks of hotels for the length of their stays. Or so it was said.

I gave our driver instructions about what we wanted to visit – and didn't. Only the royal palace enclave and nearby monastery temples called *wats*. Forget shopping, massage parlors, bars or bordellos. The coughing in the front seat miraculously abated. Visiting The Royal Grand Palace alleviated some of the tawdriness experienced so far. It came closest to representing the exotic aura of the movie "The King and I" (1956: Yul Brynner, Deborah Kerr). Its setting in a grove of pines, low ceilings and extended eaves curving up over graceful verandahs exuded a sense of history and calm amid the chaos of the city. The current constitutional monarch was H.M. Bhumibol Adulyadej, also known as Rama IX. In 1989 he was the longest reigning king in the world, crowned in 1950. On his ascent to the throne he had been living in Switzerland since childhood with his commoner mother. But he was actually born in Cambridge, Mass. while his father, then a Prince, was a student at Harvard. He lost an eye in a car accident in France in his youth and thereafter wore a false one. He met and married his first cousin, once removed, a student in Paris at the time, who was

urged by his mother to visit him frequently during convalescence. Unlike any Thai monarchs before him he was a great lover and player of popular music and maintained a jazz combo in the palace.

The palace grounds were beautiful and extensive. Set in them were throne halls, royal residences and, in one far corner, Wat Phra Kaew (Temple of the Emerald Buddha). The word *wat* indicated the temple was a monastery, and we saw a number of young monks in bright saffron robes scurrying about in twos and threes. Nearby more monks in orange robes went in and out of the tallest temple, Wat Arun. The largest in Bangkok, its gleaming white peak could be seen far and wide. But it was better, we found, to view it from afar. What looked like sparkling precious jewels covering its base and spire were on closer scrutiny merely shards of colored glass, and above, smashed pieces of patterned white porcelain crockery, giving a crackle effect. All this imbedded in cement. We agreed it looked cheesy.

Most of Bangkok was garish and cheesy. After a final turn at Wat Pho, a temple holding the largest reclining Buddha in the world, where by tradition and for luck we each bought a bag of 25 *satang* coins and plopped them into pots behind its enormous head, we asked to be taken to the Oriental Hotel, said to be the best in the world, for a touch of class. We bade farewell to our patient driver. The long-lashed "guide" was dismissed early on when we found we knew more about places we were seeing than she did by simply following travel books and road signs. She left relieved.

It was while sipping afternoon drinks at the elegant Oriental (no shorts, no sandals) that we spotted the one item we said we would both agree to purchase to represent our entire trip. In a lobby emporium specializing in classic oriental objets d'art was an antique string puppet portraying a traditional princess character.



About twenty inches long, the head, arms and legs were articulated by thin black twine. The costume was embroidered stiffened silk edged in silver gilt: the girdle was leather with a silver belt and gold buckle encircling a paste emerald jewel. The drop front panel was also leather with design features in beaten silver and gold, her slippers crafted in leather also. The noncommittal white face was porcelain and the banners erupting from her back had white pearl beads on the ends. Strangest were the disproportionate hands crudely carved from wood branches and left unfinished. The proprietor arranged to have it crated and shipped to New York, but it finally resided permanently in the Nantucket living room against appropriate black backing and spot lit for the proper “theatrical” effect.

The next morning we did something we regretted as soon as we did it. We had seen the clever three-wheeled contraptions called *tuk-tuks* that were ubiquitous to the flow of traffic everywhere, and decided it might be fun to take a ride in one of them. Flimsy looking, with a canopy roof and open sides and back and a driver in front over the single wheel, they could zoom in and out of the horrific traffic jams that plagued the city thoroughfares with ease. We wanted a change from all the temples and antiquities and hired one to take us to the famous Dusit Zoo to have a look at the equally famous white rhinos we’d read about. Well, there was a reason that *tuk-tuks* were called the most loved and most loathed vehicles on the road. Cute as they were to see and convenient for short hops, they exuded noise and billowing black clouds of smog in their wake. Also, being lower to the ground than either trucks or cars, and also being a fact that they all used diesel fuel and coughed up the smell and exhaust directly into the *tuk-tuk* passenger’s faces, we ended up with handkerchiefs tied over our noses, posse style, in order to breathe. Not to mention the temperature was rising every minute. It seemed like an eternity before we reached the elaborate gates of the zoo. The rhinos were worth seeing, but at whatever price we weren’t too sure. It also seemed that all animals anywhere that were advertised and touted as “white” this or that, almost always in reality turned out to be blotchy dishwater grey. Those rhinos were no exception.

The heat was such that we opted to have our *tuk-tuk* return to the city by the river route, the river being the Chad Phraya. It snaked through most of Rattanakosin Island where Bangkok was

situated and gave scant relief from the unbearable sun at noonday except that we got to see the backsides of the city cast in purple shadows. The crowded floating market we passed was sheer pandemonium. The produce looked colorful and tempting, but we didn't budge. Jim Thompson's house was around a bend, its veranda overlooking the river. It was he who almost single handedly restored the defunct Thai silk trade after World War II. His house, a comfortable typical Thai construction with a cool-looking verandah, had become a shrine of sorts for local silk merchants.

Back again in downtown Bangkok it was impossible to be out on the hot pavements any longer, so we did something we seldom did traveling – we found a Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) fast food place and sat inside by the (freezing) air-conditioned window sipping iced tea and gazing out at the comely back-side of a larger than life inner-lit replica of the founder himself, Colonel Sanders. A few hardy souls strolled past with paper parasols, a reminder of Noel Coward's apt refrain: "Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun." Being neither, we stayed put awhile and ordered more tea.

A good night's sleep was needed for the pre-dawn flight next morning. Neither of us liked air-conditioned bedrooms but in Thailand it was a necessary evil. I wondered, just before dozing off, if this were back in the early 1930s and still called Siam, would it have seemed more exotic than sleazy? As it was, we left just before Typhoon "Gay" blew into town, jostling the status quo. It figured.

Five hours later and a century or two earlier we arrived in India. Old Delhi looked as if it had just accumulated over time like a miraculous ancient junk pile. Inhabitants were scurrying about their daily routines in unbelievable "costumes": Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus all living and working side by side. This was true exotica. We fell immediately in love with it all, even if our first driver turned out to be a mean-spirited s.o.b who insisted we go to places of his choice well after hearing our litany about what we did not wish to see. Driving from Old into New Delhi to our hotel was like waking up in a different era. Because it was designed and built by the British during their reign, everything was arranged in orderly fashion: the wide streets, the grand palatial entrances, the manicured grounds, the government buildings, the idling limos. We were let out at the Hotel Ashok in downtown, and told by the

grumpy chauffer that he was a busy man and he'd give us ten minutes to acquire our rooms, freshen up and return for sightseeing. We noticed in passing through the lobby there were posters of the Dalai Lama and bouquets of flowers all around, but were too rushed to give it a second thought.

Grumpy drove to his/our first destination, Jama Mastid, the largest mosque in India accommodating 20,000 worshipers at a time. Dating from 1656 it was truly spectacular and unexpected. Built of red sandstone, it had white marble decorations on the façade and three towers, and black horizontal striping across its entire length. A vast inner courtyard offered a wonderful sense of serenity. Non-believers weren't permitted to wander at will, even though we had left our shoes in an adjoining vestibule, but peering through the arches gave us a glimpse of the whole. We were happy our driver had chosen it.

Back in Old Delhi on the way to the Red Fort, we asked to be let out at an open landing behind a building that intrigued us. We were given ten minutes. It was a ruin of a mosque some twenty steps up a small hill, and looked out on a wide panoramic vista. On the steps were seated some of the saddest assortments of beggars I'd ever seen: mostly very young and very old, their bodies twisted and missing parts, and wrapped in filthy rags. These were the outcasts. One boy, whose arms and legs were twisted around each other like spaghetti, had a beautiful face with Elizabeth Taylor eyes that became etched in my memory. I would like to have simply touched his shrunken shoulder, but Grumpy was c'mon-ing and eyeing his watch, so we were whisked away to *our* next choice.

The Red Fort was an enormous Moghul citadel, one of a number that once protected the city. Like the mosque, it was made of red sandstone and set high on an outcropping with its own great views all around. Fortress-like and forbidding on the outside, its interiors were almost daintily feminine. Graceful tracings adorned the walls and arches, and the largest central courtyard reminded me of the Court of the Lions in the Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain. A sense of peace arose from it, too, but my mind was on the sad boy with the violet eyes. The driver beckoned again and off we went, this time to *his* kind of place.

It was a carpet merchant's outlet. Arthur and I were furious and insisted we didn't want to do any shopping. He said just come in for a minute and look around. We refused and stayed in the car.

The owner came out and tried cajoling, but we were adamant. Eventually the driver said he wouldn't leave until we at least looked around. What could we do? Just outside the door sat another sad little boy on a crate who was hand-polishing a small ruby stuck to a stick by what looked like bubble gum. Not disfigured, but obviously very poor, he asked me to buy his jewel. I was still so angry at the driver that I curtly replied No and went inside. That incident was to also haunt me ever after. There were so many times I wished I'd bought his little ruby. How much could it have cost?

Inside the carpet bagger was offering Arthur a small cup of tea and showing his wares in a dim, rather smelly chamber. We both admitted later that there were some items there that were simply exquisite but we were in no mood. He then took us into the workshop where his loom was set up. Two small children sat cross-legged aloft on a plank, weaving on an upright rug thirty times their size. Small children were used because their tiny delicate fingers could manipulate the most intricate designs. They already showed the humped back symptoms that resulted in forcing them to do that kind of work at such a tender age. When we found out they did this every day from dawn to dusk with very little rest or food, we were outraged and yelled to Grumpy to get us back to our hotel and be quick about it. For a change he complied with a shrug. He'd obviously been paid his pittance for steering us to that place. Without a word, he dropped us at the Ashok and disappeared. We never saw him again.

Inside the lobby a small orderly crowd of Tibetan men and women in their embroidered best, with sleeves hanging characteristically down to their knees, stood along one wall holding long white silk scarves. Again we noticed the Dalai Lama posters and asked about them at the desk. Told that the Lama would be visiting the hotel shortly, we asked if there was a special reason. Yes was the answer. He, and the world, had just been informed of his winning the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize and would be heading to Stockholm for the ceremonies in December.

Two hours went by as more Tibetan nationals joined the gathering. During that time we had lunch in the dining room near the door so we could catch a glimpse of him. We also checked in with the concierge about our driver, who was supposed to pick us up again in one hour. The concierge brought word that Grumpy had refused to continue chauffeuring us and they were looking for a re-

placement. As we stood with the others in the lobby, a stirring could be heard beyond the outer doors. Several local policemen appeared, followed by a number of monks dressed in traditional maroon and saffron robes and each carrying a flower. The Tibetan people formed a double line either side of them, holding their scarves aloft. The Dalai Lama seemed to sneak in almost apologetically behind the monks, but his followers recognized him immediately, bowing and extending their white scarves out to try to touch him gently with them. (It was learned later that one did not touch the Dalai Lama directly).

Arthur and I stood back to let his followers approach him. I noted that he, like most world celebrities who appeared large on movie and TV screens, seemed unusually short in the flesh. He smiled gently to the right and left, but didn't speak. One arm was bared to the shoulder. He also held a blossom.

Officially the 14th Dalai Lama, spiritual and temporal leader of Tibetan people, he was born in a tiny mountain village to a peasant family. He was recognized at age two as the reincarnation of his predecessor, the 13th Dalai Lama (the term meant "Ocean of Wisdom"). He had been exiled by the Chinese communists for many years, making New Delhi his headquarters, but traversing the globe.

His entourage squeezed into elevators at the end of the lobby, and the doors closed on a once-in-a-lifetime serendipitous experience. The Tibetans, quietly folding up their white scarves, left the hotel with expressions of ecstasy on their faces. We were left to wonder when and if a replacement driver would appear. The arrangement for drivers and cars for every country was made back in New York and included in the travel agent's charges, so hiring another meant extra cost to us. But we didn't have to ponder long. An exuberant young man bounded up the outer steps and found us. Telling how the other guy had quit his job after dumping us because he'd had enough of "arrogant foreigners telling him what to do", he said he would be glad to be our driver for arrested and the next three days on our Golden Triangle trip. We were as delighted to have him as he was to please us.

Our last afternoon visit was the Red Fort and he got us there just before closing. The huge fort was built in 1639 as a palace by Shah Jahan, famous later for the Taj Mahal in Agra. The last emperor to use it as a palace was Zafar, Shah II, who was arrested and

imprisoned there by the British in 1857, before being deported. Designed as the worldly embodiment of Paradise as described in the Koran, its ornate throne room, in mostly Persian style, contained pink cusped arches and ceilings and rows of gilded columns. In the lushly kept garden were two women's quarters, each with gilded ceilings and a marble pool that at the moment reflected several hawks lazily circling the sunset sky.

Driving back through Old Delhi required the patience of Job. It was rush hour, Indian style, which meant total chaos. Shop keepers were shuttering, rag pickers were diving into freshly put out trash, every kind of vehicle was jostling every other kind of vehicle for space, and a marching mosaic of pedestrians was choking narrow sidewalks. It was also our first encounter with the ubiquitous sacred cows that are allowed to roam at will. No one was supposed to touch the horned white creatures, so they walked or lolled in the middle of streets at will, doing wonders for the already hideous traffic situations. During one of many pauses, I glanced out the window and noticed a solid brick wall against which a long line of men were urinating – out in the open! It seemed there were many such walls in the old city, each with a corresponding gutter below for drainage. One wondered what the ladies did.

Back at the hotel it was early evening and nap time. But before we reached the elevator we heard music and laughter coming from one of the adjoining ballrooms and looked in. A sumptuous wedding feast was in full swing, with women resplendent in glittering *saris* and men in *sherwanis* (elegant silk embroidered coats to be-low the knees with mandarin collars, worn over white trousers and white shoes). On a raised dais at one end were the bride and groom in traditional costumes, he in a white robe and ornate turban, she in a (traditional) red *sari* and head scarf flecked with gold, with many necklaces and a diamond-encrusted gold chain trailing from a nose ring to an earring. They both looked stunning, and we soon found out why: they were well-known stars in “Bollywood” (the Indian equivalent of Hollywood) films. A male relative standing just inside the doorway invited us to join the party, but looking down at ourselves and then at them, we chose not to ruin the picture, which was as rich as a medieval tapestry.

The next morning began the first leg of the Golden Triangle we had really come for. It actually was a triangle of sorts, from New Delhi to Jaipur to Agra and back to Delhi. The 5-hour trip to Jaipur

took us into the state of Rajasthan. Along the way we encountered many peasant women in brilliant *saris* of yellow, orange, blue and red. Our driver noted that poor women chose brightly colored clothing so it would take longer to fade. Instead of working the nearby fields because of the long-time drought that affected the area, they were collecting the dung of those ubiquitous sacred cows along the highways to stack, dry and use as fuel. Boys were tagging along behind with cattle-drawn wooden carts to carry them off. About those sacred cows: they were considered that by Hindus and in rural areas were a measure of wealth. But sacred basically for what they produced, such as milk, yoghurt and buttermilk that were important staples in their diet; the dung that was free and use-ful for fuel; their tame demeanors that made them excellent beasts of burden. Even after death their skins could be used in various ways. In the countryside they remained mainly in fields under watchful supervision, but over time numbers migrated into cities, causing traffic jams because by ancient tradition – not religion – they were treated as embodiments of gods and not to be disturbed or moved in any way. In fact it was considered good luck if one of them passed in front of you, unlike the proverbial black cat.

The route to Jaipur from Delhi was a main thoroughfare and wheeled vehicles of every sort traveled its length, including our old friends, *tuk-tuks* (same spelling). But there were as many four-footed animals as four-wheel drives along the way. Besides sacred cows pulling wagonloads of hay, there were horses and the occasional herd of camels, some hauling enormous timbers that filled the width of the roads and caused their own form of traffic tie-ups. Dogs skirted the periphery. And then there were the automobile breakdowns with crowds of men diving under the hoods to seek the reasons, while women and children stood at the sides shouting encouragement. The journey was total theater.

Jaipur, often called the “Pink City” because it was built mainly of colored stucco to imitate red sand stone but over several centuries had faded to a lovely blush, was the first “planned” city in India, the capitol of the eastern quarter, Rajasthan. Laid out in 1727 of even geometric areas with wide streets and many public parks by its founder Maharajah Sawai Jai Singh, it contains a splendid royal residence, the City Palace, and adjacent to it, Hawal Mahal (Palace of the Winds), a narrow marvel of Hindu and Moghal architecture five stories high and one large room wide. It was

each time it smacked the rail that our skimpy seats perilously hung over (we thought on purpose). Our feet were out in space every other heave. Arthur, who couldn't stand heights anyway, spent what he remembered as a half hour eternity with eyes tightly closed and fingers white-knuckled on the crossbar holding us in. I actually feared getting seasick from swaying glances at everything below. Our *howdah* (driver), was hunched forward and appeared to be napping in the sun atop the elephant's head, his feet dangling limply down behind its ears. It was indeed a hot afternoon, but the sweat dripping off our brows was not from heat, but sheer terror. Dismounting was a relief.

Made of red sandstone and white marble in Hindu and Muslim style architecture beginning in 1592, it was a sprawling example of 16th century Rajput living: a militant, temperamental, self-indulgent warrior era. It seemed to be an outcrop of the hill beneath it, rough hewn and practical outside, but sophisticated and highly civilized inside its walls. Complete with palaces, pavilions, temples and ornate halls, it also included a red stone sculpture of the elephant god, Ganesha, with its trunk curved down over its man's body. It adorned the Elephant gate leading to the private palace. Arthur, being a fancier and collector of Ganesha carvings paused there, also examining the side paintings of related themes still fresh looking with their original vegetable dyes.

Through the gateway lay the magnificent Sheesh Mahal (Hall of Mirrors). The interplay of light and architecture compared favorably with that of Versailles. A small hint of sunlight on the intricate network of mirrors brought the entire hall to life, and sparkled out onto an immense geometric herb garden with water feature accents. We walked a ways taking in the courtyards and lawns and sweeping views, then opted to hike back down the hill, trying to steer clear of the elephants lunging up toward us. Their rhythm alone made me squeamish.

At the base of the ramparts lay the old medieval city of Amber with its many temples, memorials and town houses, keeping the flavor well and alive. There our faithful driver was waiting to take us back to our hotel. The next morning began the next leg of the Triangle, Jaipur to Agra. The four hour trip would lead back north again. The main highway had somewhat less commercial travel, but far more interesting pedestrian traffic. It was the route of the legendary holy men of India.

Holiness was still a common part of Hindu life of India. Days often began in homes and shops with prayers to favorite gods at personal altars and shrines. Objects of nature – trees, rivers, hills, etc. – were considered sacred, as were many animals besides cows. So too there were people who became holy. To Indians holiness was not necessarily “goodness”. Some of their gods were truly monstrous, what in Hinduism was known as “divine madness.” Actually, enlightenment was attainable to everyone, but they would need many incarnations to become holy.

Some preferred to reach enlightenment in the present life instead of the next. Mostly men, called *sadhus*, they had been roaming India for millennia, usually living alone or in small groups away from society and devoting all their lives to worship of a chosen deity. Some performed magical rituals while others practiced intense forms of yoga and meditation. They could be recognized by the markings on their foreheads (sometimes elaborate, sometimes downright scary) and the color and type of their clothing, or lack of it. One sect, for example, wandered about in nothing but dreadlocks and garlands of blossom around their necks. We encountered a few skinny ones in passing.

Not all were “enlightened” but believers regarded them as holy anyway, and gave them donations and food. Society had long been organized to support them, since they were not supposed to work. Traditionally they were allowed to ride trains and buses free and were endearingly addressed as “*Baba*”, meaning ‘Father’. The forms of worship the holy men chose to follow were sometimes extreme and, to western eyes, outrageous. Our driver told of a man who stood with one arm raised for so many years his fingers withered away. Others embraced daunting yoga positions and didn’t move for months on end. We passed a *sadhu* standing on one leg painted yellow from knee down with the rest of his body and face painted red and a girdle of rooster feathers around his waist. His long hair was shaped into a cockscomb and a bright yellow beak masked his face from the eyes down. Several along the roadside were cross-legged in trees with grotesquely painted faces, long hair to their waists. Bowls with fruit and flower offerings from the faithful graced the bases of some trunks. We also came upon periodic open areas where ordinary men gathered to bathe at water spouts rising from cement bases. They seemed oblivious to the passing traffic, like animated fountain figures, scrubbing bodies

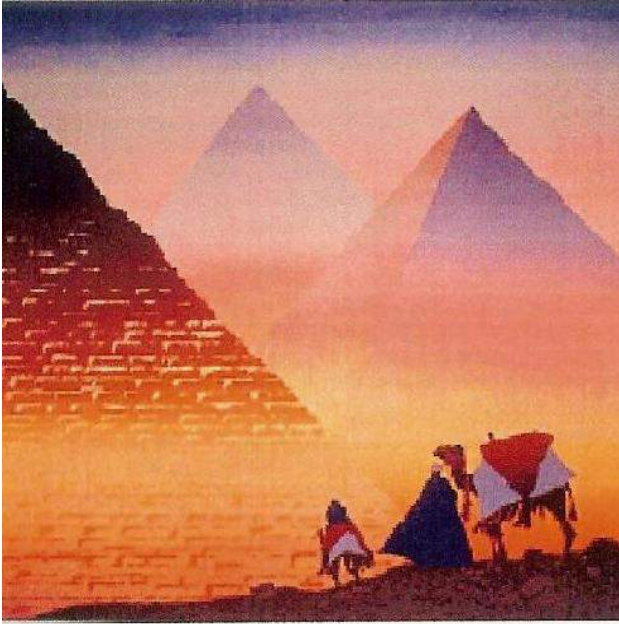
and hair as well as rinsing out clothing. All in all it certainly made the time pass quickly to Agra.

On a plateau along the Yamuna River in the state of Utar Pradesh lay the medieval city of Agra, originally called Agrabana, and mentioned in the ancient Indian epic *Mahabharata* as “Paradise”. It dates from the golden age of Mughal architecture. It was also the birthplace of the Radhaswami Faith that in 1989, when we visited there, had two million followers worldwide. It also contained a Red Fort like the one in Delhi. But the main reason for anyone to venture there was just one edifice – the legendary Taj Mahal.

Indian residents, tourists and art lovers from everywhere had made it the most famous building in India, if not the world. Most of us approached it as on a pilgrimage to witness the ultimate pinnacle of manmade beauty. Its history was well known. Begun in 1649 by Shah Jahan, who had moved his capitol from Jaipur, it was a mausoleum for his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal. (It always amused me when I read magazine real estate ads that touted whatever newly erected apartment complex as getting the ultimate in luxurious living space, as in “How would you like to live in the Taj Mahal?”, little mind being made, or a copy writer too stupid to know, that the place was a burial tomb!) But despite all the hype and cliché regarding it for centuries it still remained for us an astounding and mesmerizing experience in person, as if unknowingly coming upon it for the first time.

Set upon a high marble platform, the shimmering white structure appeared to float when first viewed from the main entrance gate. Drawing nearer along the rectangular reflecting pool dividing the gardens and up the steps to the main doorway, one sensed the majesty of its complete symmetry: the arrangements of arches and panels across the front with the corners truncated to form an unequal octagon; the enormous central dome rising sixty feet high over the tomb of Mumtaz; the four smaller corresponding domes; the four slender corner minarets. All formed of gleaming white marble. As one came closer, however, it became apparent that what was thought to be a solid white marble façade actually had the world’s most elegant graffiti inlaid in it: verses from the Koran in fine black marble script adorned the exterior; mythical beasts, birds and flowers in mosaics of semi-precious stones decorated the interior. Standing inside the enormous burial chamber was like being transported into another place and time,

PENDANT WORLD SUBJECTS
Screen Prints by Donn Russell



GIZA (Egypt)

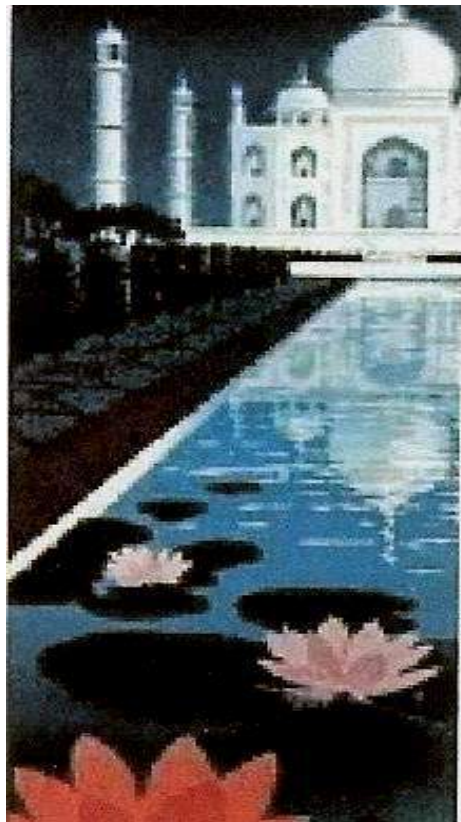


ROYAL ROAD (Bangkok, Thailand)

Pendant World Subjects



HARBOR FLEET (Hong Kong)



TAJ MAHAL (Agra, India)

unaware it took 22 years to complete with over 20,000 workers, masons and jewelers involved. One marveled also at the incredible talent of the inspired Persian architect, Usted Ahmed, in designing it. Originally called simply *rauza* (tomb) its more famous appellation was later derived from the dead wife's name. A simple *rauza* it wasn't.

We spent almost two hours roaming the grounds. But I kept returning to the main gateway to sit on a marble bench in the shade, trying to recapture the thrill of that first glimpse from afar. Arthur interrupted my reverie with an urgent call of nature, and I realized I could use one too. But there were no toilets anywhere in sight. By then we both really had to go. In desperation we walked around to the backside of the main building to where the Yamuna River was supposed to flow past. But because of the years-long draught, it had dried up, leaving only undergrowth and bulrushes. We scooted behind the least revealing clump and relieved the pressure. No one was the wiser, and we were able to brag later of being the only two we knew to *christen* the Taj Mahal. The only disappointment was that we had planned to be in Agra at a full moon, when the building was said to be at its most resplendent and ethereal. But we learned on arrival that, because of recent terrorist bomb threats, no moon viewing would be allowed in the future. And, damn, we had even consulted astronomical and calendrical charts.

Before leaving Agra, our driver/guide suggested a quick visit to the Red Fort (not to be confused with the ones in Delhi or Jaipur). Apart from the elaborate Elephant gate trimmed with elephants and dragons, it differed little from the others except in shape (crescent), and the fact that in 1688 Shah Jahan was imprisoned there by his son Aurangzeb after a family quarrel and spent his last eight years in solitude in one of the towers with a small balcony overlooking the *rauza* of his beloved wife. He was buried alongside her in the fabulous mausoleum he had erected – eventually to all mankind. The poet Rabindranath Tagore touchingly described it as rising from the banks of the river “like a solitary tear suspended on the cheek of time.”

But sentiment aside, it was time to return to Delhi and, after an overnight at the Ashok again, to continue on to the next destination, Cairo. We arrived at the airport well before scheduled take-off time and bade farewell to our loyal driver. But joining the several hundred distinctly disturbed other passengers milling about

and no sign of a plane, we realized something was amiss. Fate was about to drastically intervene. That fate was Bahrain. I awoke from my reverie.

Back at the American Mission Hospital in Bahrain, Arthur was up and about, but frail. The doctor had said he would discharge him at the end of the week. So I stopped lolling about and got busy trying to arrange our exit. At the time there were only two scheduled flights a week to Cairo, and one of them was fully booked. By a little maneuvering the airline agent got us on the other leaving in three days. Luckily I'd bought a shirt and slacks for Arthur already, but needed incontinent pants because he had lost all control of his bowels and bladder. A kindly hotel attendant sent a runner to the *souk* for them. When the time came, I took my last limo to the hospital where two nurses and a doctor had Arthur up ready to go in his new clothes. One of the nurses (they were all Indian) had also changed from a crisp white uniform to the *sari* and nose rings she usually wore outside. She would have to help walk Arthur to a waiting taxi and eventually to a waiting plane – she on one side of him, I on the other squeezing him into an erect walking position so that it would appear nothing was wrong. If police saw that he was ill, she said they would very likely have taken us both for questioning and delayed our travel.

Everything worked fine and he was put on the plane without incident. I had already handed in my pass and been given back my passport. The Air India flight took 4 hours to Cairo. Arthur slept the entire way. Looking out at the city as we came in for a landing I was reminded of a remark Cecil Beaton, the British designer and photographer of royalty, allegedly made when he arrived to spruce up the quarters of the British Navy in World War II. Surveying the territory he put his hand to his chest and exclaimed, "But it's so – beige!" I then knew how he felt. Cairo was dusty and – beige: the buildings, the streets, the trees, the parks – all one color. Luckily there was a representative of the local travel company there to greet us. He was a student who said he had come out to meet every plane from Bahrain for a week, the dear. It seemed my cables to them hadn't got through. We were whisked to the heart of downtown to a businessmen's hotel that was busy and anonymous, but adequate. Arthur was put to bed and I went for a glimpse of the

Nile, thankfully *not* beige.

Walking along the cornice I saw small “*fellucas*” with upside down red sails glide slowly by, remembering that the original name for the river was the Greek *neilos* –valley, and that when it flooded its shores it left behind black sediment, the reason why ancient Egyptians called it *Ar*, black. Several old men were catching eels under a bridge. The hot desert air was softened by a light breeze. In the distance was the faint haze indicating it was the time of year for the advent of *siroccos*, the fierce blinding sand storms swirling out of the Sahara. We had an Egyptian-born friend in Nantucket who told of families taping all around doors and windows and going out with faces and bodies fully covered when the winds finally descended with full force. They could sandblast cheeks in seconds.

We had forfeited the best part of our tour of Egypt because of Arthur’s illness, namely the boat ride to Luxor and the Valley of the Kings. But we did get to visit the pyramids next day. They could be seen from downtown Cairo. Arthur remained in the car, still too weak to walk far. Upon seeing the largest of the three, the Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops), I suddenly recalled an early sepia photograph my parents had hung in the hallway at home showing a native in Arabic costume seated praying below a camel’s neck, out of the sun, and far off that very pyramid rising like the answer to a geometry quiz. As I approached the real thing however, I was stunned by its massive size. At the moment the very last surviving of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World, it was comprised of 2 million stone blocks each weighing 2.5 tons and erected around 2690 B.C. I couldn’t go far down into the valley because the *siroccos* had already begun obliterating its base with a sky-blue-pink haze. The other two pyramids could barely be seen. But before one of them, Khafre, was the undeniable outline of the Sphinx.

The reclining creature, carved mostly from one stone with the body of a lion and head of a pharaoh (thought to be Khafre), was at the moment undergoing a facelift. Scaffolding propped up the chin area, but its enigmatic expression was as awe inspiring as when early Arabs called it *Abu al Hul* – Father of Terror. Meanwhile Arthur, back in the car, passed the time watching a group of hefty German tourists in lederhosen trying to mount uncooperative, spitting camels for rides, undoubtedly part of the package tour.

A quick run-through of the Cairo Museum with Arthur in a

wheelchair produced only an enticing glimpse of the treasures of boy king Tut's tomb. All that glittered WAS gold! A casual gander at the Papyrus Museum (they used that stuff for everything — paper, boats, rope, mattresses, sandals.....) and that was all we got to see of Cairo and environs. We had to rest up for the last two long legs of our journey, Cairo to Paris (5 hours) and Paris to New York (8 hours). All we got to see of Paris was a hard bench in De Gaulle Airport. But then we'd done Paris many times before— in youth and beyond. Our original 3-week schedule flew out the window, of course, but hey, that window was the world.

In New York Arthur entered St. Vincent Hospital for a week's observation during which they could not find what had afflicted him. They surmised that the doctors in Bahrain, in their eagerness to be helpful, had masked whatever it was with overdoses of antibiotics. He remained incontinent for years afterward, yet he had the last word on our whirlwind adventure. When asked what he would do for an encore he replied, "This year I went around the world. Next year I'm going someplace else."

Begun New York City 1992 Completed on Arthur's 96th birthday, Mar. 19, 2009

A SHORE THING



This writer began beachcombing as a youngster on the summer coast of Maine, captivated by rainbows in mussel shells and silver-polished driftwood, frosted beach glass that turned bright and clear when wet, and small stones – all sorts. They were collected, then brought home in bulging pockets and painstakingly lined up on every reachable window sill for fullest effect. Losing luster overnight, they were usually discarded next day and the process repeated. Years later, with a decidedly more professional eye for debris (mainly wood) that might be incorporated into imaginative new design forms, the search led to the southern shoreline of Nantucket, an island far enough into the Atlantic to lure the choicest flotsam away from waves heaving toward Cape Cod. An ideal time for hitting the beach was following a raging nor'easter, with the surf still pounding and spewing splintered remnants of civilization back in its wake. But otherwise on most mornings, at least July through Labor Day, it was best to set out about sunrise to avoid confronting the “cliffies”.

The seasonal renters of the fancy “cottages” on the cliffs, who coveted phosphorescent driftwood for their evening fireside chats, didn’t begin plundering until after bloodymary brunch. But then their four-wheel-drives descended from the heights en masse, rutting the terrain and scooping up anything that would burn. Prime specimens that weren’t removed or hidden in the tall dune grass before the onslaught were doomed to go up in smoke that very

night and lost to posterity – or Great Art! Tardy beachcombers wasted precious midday minutes chasing, flailing and shouting (“Hey, that’s *my* driftwood, stupid!”) after Jeeps bolting out of ear-shot with the pilfered stuff. It was enough to leave frustrated old hands ranting and stomping in the sand – gestures they knew damn well were as futile as, well, ranting and stomping in sand.

A seasoned beachcomber learned to dress for the sun, even when it wasn’t out; cut-offs over sturdy workman’s boots; a long-sleeved shirt *never* rolled up; a wide-brimmed straw hat with an under chin rawhide tie for gusts; heavy-duty gloves and a net bag; a round-the-waist pack holding sunscreen, first aid kit, a small screw driver and hammer. It also helped to have legs toughened for trudging through sand and withstanding stings from green flies that had a tendency to swarm out of the dunes at the least convenient wind change.

Throughout the 1970s the shoreline was sporadically strewn with the remains of once-round wooden keg tops. Some bore holes for stoppers. Some had them embedded. Others were mere fragments. Their persistent appearance season after season led to speculations about their source. The legal limit for foreign commercial fishing at the time was three miles from mainland U.S., yet Russian trawlers were sighted daily on the near horizon in almost thumb-nosing disregard. Word spread they were the culprits doing the dumping, so it became accepted fact, although, since only the tops seemed to wash ashore, an unsolved mystery lingered as to what happened with the kegs themselves.

But it didn’t matter where they came from. To any beachcomber worth his weight in salt water, the mere sight of those curvilinear shapes, just begging to be picked up, was enough to induce all sorts of middle-of-the-night concepts for their use. The only concern was whether there would continue to be enough of them rolling in on the tides to sustain multiple editions. As many armloads as possible were stacked and tied in the fore and aft wire baskets of a bicycle and pedaled back to town. (A station wagon augmented the bicycle later in the decade.)

The first successful (meaning finally completed) design was a three-fold divider screen with “floating” components connected to each other by invisible piano wire. Six-feet square when fully extended, the hinged frames were formed from weathered unfinished 2”x3” building studs. They were then laid side by side against a

black drop cloth on the studio floor. Arranging the component into a satisfying overall design took a back-breaking month of trial and error and stooping and cursing. When finished, it was found the prototype employed so many more pieces than anticipated that it became doubtful whether enough more remained – or would ever appear - back out on the beach for a full production. However, undaunted, the project progressed.

The first gallery owner to see the prototype checked it out forward and back and pronounced it “too clunky”. True, the screen was extremely heavy and difficult to maneuver. But once in place – the right place- it had an almost lace-like quality, especially from a certain distance. A distant distance. The next gallery person saw it as “virile, bold and assertive”. He offered to exhibit it in his window for an unspecified time. The deal was to take orders for others in whatever size requested, using similar tops and pieces in similar arrangements. (The term *similar* was emphasized since no two could possibly be the same).

It was an artistic success, meaning it got a lot of attention and remarks, and several patrons offered to purchase the prototype. But that wasn't possible because, with it gone, there'd be nothing to reference it. Later – too late – the artist and gallery owner realized that the prototype should have been sold and then another one made to replace it in the window. But by then strollers had become accustomed to the sight and passed by with hardly a glance. It was also disturbing to discover on subsequent beach treks that there were fewer and fewer wooden keg tops washing up anywhere.

It couldn't have been only the “cliffies”. They were gone by Labor Day each year. News articles subsequently appeared mourning the continued loss of pollock, haddock and halibut in the waters of the Atlantic, and authorities were claiming them already “commercially extinct”. The Russian trawlers, along with those of other foreign countries, were abandoning the waters off New England for more lucrative fishing grounds - well before President Ronald Reagan's edict that changed the outer limits from 3 to 12 nautical miles in the 1980s. (Statistically there were over 10,000 trawlers fishing off Nantucket, etc. in 1970. By 1990 that number had been reduced to less than 1400.)

That spelled doom for the production of room dividers as a business venture. Increasingly the wooden keg tops along the shore were being supplanted by ugly plastic discs, bleach-proof and as

repugnant as the rest of the encroaching detritus of modern progress. After being photographed for publications, the one and only original three-fold charmer returned to zigzag beyond the baby grand, dividing the living room. There it remained a proud beacon to misguided Yankee ingenuity.

A studio standout was a room-wide cupboard built across the space above the sink and counter top. Made to look like one long frieze of shells and driftwood, stylistically in homage to the sculptor Louise Nevelson's dynamic assemblages, it was actually five separate wooden doors opening onto as many storage compartments. After the dearth of Russian keg tops for inspiration, the next best things available to a determined beachcomber were the old standbys: shells, stones and odd bits of branch chosen more or less randomly from along the water's edge. These were arranged by trial and error to the adjoining doors laid on the floor in the same manner as the divider. Nails and glue held the vertical driftwood in place. Small holes were drilled in the brittle shells, then tiny brads pressed through them into the doors. When all the elements were artfully in place and secured, the entire piece was sprayed with umpteen coats of white enamel to create the effect of a seamless whole. Constructed circa 1981, the fact that there were no knobs or handles initially made finding each door opening a challenge.



All serious beachcombing exists at the mercy of a fickle sea. It might or might not disgorge any useful drifting material at whim. A day or even a week could pass without so much as a token twig tossed up onto the beach. Respites like these offered other rewards. The broad brim of a combers's hat, that usually cut the universe in half horizontally as the eyes were kept directed downward during the search, might be raised to reveal the horizon and sky and all that traversed it. Gulls were not just cawing sounds but flexed white Vs circling updrafts. Clouds were not merely dark blotches on the sand. Squinting straight up was a reminder that the sun was

why the brim had to be broad. The world was lighter.

The sight of softly swaying dune grass was like watching The Wave at half-time around a football stadium. Or hair care commercials. A hike through the tall stuff had its own calming effects and revelations. Aside from an occasional copulating couple and cinders from a midnight cookout, it was possible to discover partially buried antique bottles, amazingly amethyst from salt and sun. Or a pockmarked skiff anchor, dug in and pimpled with barnacles and lichen, its shredded rope end fingering a breeze. And beer cans and beer cans, the scourge of open spaces. Sometimes capricious bathers stuck them on long poles in the ground like medieval trophy heads - reminders of our "litter-ate" age.

Walking west along the tops of the dunes, ocean to the left, it was easy to spot a little shack in the middle of the moors to the right. It had stood for many years as a tiny weathered beacon, the only structure for miles around. Thought to be empty and abandoned, in late afternoon one August there was a flurry of activity around it. On closer scrutiny its only door was ajar. A top-hinged plywood storm blind running the length of the building had been pushed out and up, propped by poles at both ends to act as a sunshade over a rough opening in the wall that became an improvised picture window with a panoramic vista of sand, sea, sky... and sunsets. Inside, four elderly women, chatting and laughing lyrically, sat at a makeshift table on mismatched chairs, playing whist and enjoying, of all things, tea (laced, as later ascertained, with a hint of brandy). Right there in the middle of nowhere, having a grand old time! Looking out, they waved "Helloooo *Senor* [for the hat]. Sunset soon."

The shack turned out to be owned by a Mrs. Morgan, the driver, who parked her vintage vehicle at the end of the solitary dirt road some hundred feet back. (Something of a character in her own right, she owned a home that had seen better days in the fashionable part of town, with a lovely "old-lady" garden out front she tended herself in lace-edged gloves and sunbonnet. When cold weather threatened she fled the island to hole up in her little *pied-a-terre* in Manhattan. Every winter's day, snow or shine, she could be seen skating around the ice rink in Rockefeller Center, the old dest and most graceful figure there. She also evinced great interest in Nantucket history. She named the shack 'Winona' after an Indian princess whose father was the chief of the local tribe of that

section of the island. A quarter-board with the name carved into it hung above the door.) Going there only happened when the spirit moved them, it seemed, no set pattern. But it was important to ascertain in advance whether the sunset appeared likely to be spectacular. An everyday sunset was no option. The ladies struck out on foot from the car over the rough undergrowth, carrying thermoses and baskets of necessities for tea time.

Aside from the ramshackle furniture the place was utterly bare – no water, no plumbing no shelves, no cots, no pictures. Nothing. Mrs. Morgan later revealed that keeping it that way was her deterrent to long-term squatters (“hippies all”) and to any ideas the “girls” might harbor about lingering beyond sunset. She didn’t care to drive after dusk.

Unfortunately the deterrent didn’t hold. Early the next spring, when out that way on the first foray of the season, the shack looked like a cyclone had struck it. Broken into over the winter, there was debris and excrement everywhere. A fire, made from the furniture, had blazed a hole in the floor. One wall was partly burned away with the rest of it flapping in the wind. The sunshade hung limply off one hinge. On telling Mrs. Morgan the sad news, she gasped, sat down for a moment, then rose and softly said she would not go out there again, preferring to remember it as it was. Her only request, eagerly granted, was that the remaining timber be removed from the site – all of it, with no traces. It was.

The boards with the best patinas were transported a few at a time by bicycle back to the studio over the course of the summer. The finest of those were set aside for possible one-of-a-kind pieces of furniture, incorporated with other woods for interesting textures and design. The rest became partial paneling for the living and bed rooms. All were glowing tributes to the lovely gentlewoman who once befriended a wayfarer on the moors and offered him a gift of “pure” silver. By the time the shack was leveled and recycled, she was likely circling Rockefeller Center. We never met again. The “Winona” plaque was gone, the shack was gone, and a year later so was our generous benefactor.

Not all driftwood was gathered for what could be made out of it. Whenever a particularly appealing specimen showed up on the strand, it was examined on all sides and from all angles like a

piece of carving. If it passed muster it was hauled back home to join others as garden sculpture. Its worth was determined by how long it continued to please. Most lasted only a season. But one such find was so spectacular it became widely renowned and remained in the home on view permanently. Its story began innocently enough – or not.

It was on a Sunday morning in the eighties that coincided with the last day of the Madequecham Jam, an annual midsummer beer/booze/drugs/free sex/Frisbee event that was annual only if the college students who made up its constituency got to the secret bashing spot on Nantucket's shoreline before the local constabulary or State police did. The time and place were supposedly known only along Boston's higher education grapevine and the like across the country. A full weekend affair that began when you got there and ended when you left. The drinking and ensuing rowdiness were mythic, and the scourge of home owners along the cliffs whose properties were trampled, broken into and defecated upon (there were no public toilets anywhere near the outposts where the shindigs were held).

Eventually the yearly Jams grew such crowds – thousands – that an ordinance was passed forbidding them, and the ferries and airports were heavily watched. Any day tripper resembling a Jammer or the age group was escorted off the island post haste. (They later discovered Ft. Lauderdale).

The morning in question was a beauty out of a guidebook. This beachcomber was lured farther afield than usual. The brim of the straw hat was pulled down to eye level and the eye was on the pickings when suddenly a naked couple, belly down on towels, appeared within tripping distance. They were the fringe of a vast throng that seemed to extend for miles down the coast, lolling, dancing, squealing in the icy surf, eating, drinking and tossing Frisbees - a veritable beach bacchanalia. The boys seemed to flaunt their lack of constraints with *bravura*, letting it all hang. Young women were more demure in bikini bottoms, hugging themselves even down to the water.

Beside the first couple was an interesting looking flat board with a bump on one end, partly buried. Asking if they minded my picking it up (it seemed at first like a perfect seat for a three-legged stool), they, and others around jumped up and helped dig it out. When it was turned over, to whoops of laughter, a cedar knot ap-

appendage was exposed in an exact likeness of a man's private parts. (The bump in back completed the torso.) To raucous stark "naked" applause, it was borne face up out of the multitude and homeward to become a coffee table icon. Dubbed Adam, it prompted a diligent search for a mate, but, demure or not, Eve remained ever elusive.

Not long after Adam was set on display, Mary Doyle Curran visited. She was the professor of Irish Studies at UMASS, known for her Dublin wit and legendary tippling. A group of more sedate elderly friends were also on hand when, on her second scotch she swung around in the Eames chair and declared,

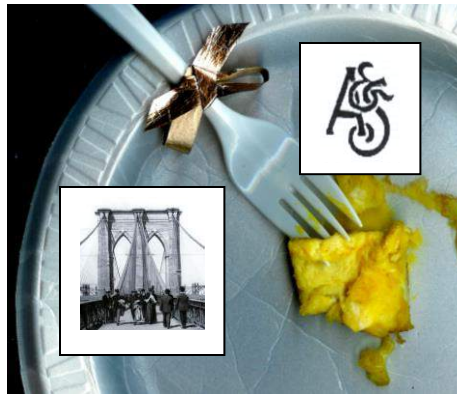
" You know, I've been looking at that thing ever since I got here, and I have just now figured out why. He's like every man I've had in my life: all cock and no balls!"

The rattled old folks made polite excuses and vanished. Mary silently nursed another scotch. There was really nothing more to say.



New York City, January 2009

BON APPETIT!



Brooklyn Bridge. Abraham & Straus. Julia Child. Those three disparate but easily recognized “legends” briefly and unwittingly collaborated for a day. My colleague Arthur and I started out on the first, that led to the second, that led to the third, all in the course of a single eventful morning, It went like this:

Once upon the fall of 1978, we sat in our West Greenwich Village apartment, reading different segments of the morning New York Times. On one of the Arts and Leisure pages, I spied a brief notice that famed “French Chef” Julia Child was going to give a free cooking demonstration at the famed Abraham & Straus –New York’s first and, to many, most elegant department store ever – in Brooklyn the following Monday at 10 a.m. sharp. The public was invited. First come first served. Since we were of the Arts and had plenty of Leisure, we decided to accept, never having had the pleasure of the company of any of the abovementioned before.

The following Monday we rose early enough, we thought, to be among the first for the 10 o’clock opening of the store’s acclaimed Art Deco entrance on Fulton Street in Brooklyn. In a royal screw-up involving unfamiliar East Side subway stops, we, being strictly West Side denizens, found ourselves emerging out of a station marked Brooklyn Bridge into, unfortunately, all too familiar territory. We were still in Manhattan, but on the lower east side, not downtown Brooklyn as we had hoped. But the bridge was in sight. What to do? The logical thing, of course. Start walking. Across it. So we did.

The great structure, long celebrated in art, verse and song, loomed majestically ahead: its legendary gothic arches, the very portals to heaven, its main cables, the earth’s umbilical chords. It

took steely determination on our part to dodge rush hour traffic and arrive unscathed at the stone steps leading up to the so-called Bridge Promenade, a broad elevated walkway spanning the full length above the vehicular lanes. From the Manhattan approach, it seemed as endless as an Arizona highway, probably because the slight curve upward at the center of the structure temporarily obscured the other end.

Starting across, we both realized hiking the bridge was something we'd never thought to do in all our years as New Yorkers, so we looked on it as an adventure – initially. The autumn air seemed more crisp up there and the wind stronger, so much so that we had to zip up jackets and constantly buck it, losing, as we would learn, valuable time and energy. However, peering down through the harp-string vertical cables in passing, the East River far below was awash with barges, scenic tour boats, tugs and sails – a floating city unto itself. Arthur couldn't resist pausing now and then to take it all in, like deep breaths. He found the perspective truly astonishing. Even the seagulls, flapping check-marks overhead, seemed whiter and cleaner. My mind harked back to the famous sepia photograph of the first group invited to cross the bridge after its completion at the end of May, 1883: a privileged lot, it comprised another Arthur, U.S. President Chester A. and the mayors of Manhattan and Brooklyn, who had advanced from their respective boroughs with all their retinue to the middle, where they were seen shaking hands, doffing derbies and thumping backs, like it was all their doing. From early accounts a great celebration with record crowds followed, culminating in the firing of cannons, and soon after that P.T.Barnum led the great Jumbo and all his other pachyderms across to test its strength.

The most memorable figure I recalled however, was Emily Roebling, the wife of John and mother of Washington Roebling. She had taken over supervision of the last 11 years of construction after both men suffered debilitating illnesses following exposure to the river – John, the original builder, from an accident that caused his toes to be amputated (he later died of tetanus infection), and Washington who became ill with decompression sickness from a deep diving accident and wasn't able to ascend great heights. I could picture her still, riding stiffly triumphant in a little carriage, tight-bonneted, tight lipped, and holding a live rooster on her lap, the symbol of victory. Right where we walked.

There were no roosters roosting anywhere the morning we went across, nor cannons booming for that matter. But there was still a lot of activity to and fro: office workers rushing to their jobs, goose-bumped runners battling the breeze, and many bikers – some carefree, some careless – whizzing past in both directions. Nearing the Brooklyn end we both suddenly realized we had no idea where the Abraham & Straus store was. On Fulton Street, yes, but *where* on Fulton? How stupid! Checking watches we also realized it was nearing 10 a.m. already, so as soon as we stepped off the exit ramp we hailed a taxi, too pooped to continue walking.

During a bumpy bilingual ride to the department store, we checked out some basic facts about it gleaned from various sources. Founded in 1865 as Wechsler and Abraham (Joseph Wechsler and Abraham Abraham), it was bought out by brothers Nathan and Isidor Straus in 1893 – they who would soon own Macy's – and run by Simon Rothschild, Abraham's son-in-law, with his son Lawrence added as a partner. In 1912 Isidor and his wife Ida perished in the sinking of the Titanic. Around 1915, when Abraham's daughter married Isidor's son Percy, the Straus family divided the empire with Nathan's family running A&S and Isidor's controlling Macy's. Got it? Just a year after our visit, A&S was converted to Macy's, but what we saw in 1978 was an A&S still struggling with the process of being revitalized and relevant. The street floor was modernized, the rest left as it was originally intended, an Art Deco gem. An interesting feature begun in the mid 1970s and in place the day we visited, was to invite exceptional students, boys and girls, from schools throughout the five boroughs to become live store window models, each for an hour at a time. They modeled the very top line of clothing available inside (no polyester here, harrumphed the coordinator). The gimmick was so popular that eventually the borough president had to put a stop to it. The spill-over crowds around the windows grew so large they were severely obstructing vehicular traffic on Fulton.

Arthur and I had no time to explore the interior of the main floor once we left the taxi. We were already 10 minutes or so late for our breakfast appointment. So we eschewed watching the teenagers strut their stuff behind glass and dashed to the center of the floor where the elevators banks were. Impatiently waiting for the special one that would take us to the top floor, we spent toe tapping minutes checking out the elliptically shaped hall that en-

closed them and the zig-zag pattern on the original nickel and bronze hardware, besides the famed Rene Lalique carved frosted glass boxes alongside each that had been created to hold the light indicators. –all stuff we’d been reading about in the taxi. Unfortunately none of those indicators was working at the moment, so we had no way of knowing what floor our elevator was at or when it might reach us.

When it did and we entered, it was like something out of Radio City Music Hall: elegant tinted mirror walls with overlaid etched loop-de-loop patterns and arches within arches above in muted gold, fawn and charcoal shades. The ride up, however, was less fancy Art Deco than a throwback to Minsky’s Burlesque – all bumps and grinds. The mechanisms of those things must not have been greased since they were installed in 1865. When the elevator door cranked open on 7 we were expecting another gasp-inducing Deco masterpiece of exquisite design.

Instead, what met us was just another cavernous attic storage space with peeling green walls and age-blackened floors, smelling of disuse. The windows were painted over like in old factories. Large cardboard and wooden boxes had been stacked all along the back wall and the overhead lighting was something out of a Prohibition Era boxing gym. A store employee, sweet and wearing a paper apron, lifted two aluminum folding chairs from a pile and seated us in the only available free space – an aisle. The rest was filled to capacity with accoutered women of a certain age, their shopping bags parked on the floor like obedient pets. The few older men sprinkled among them gave us wan “welcome to the club” smiles over shrugged shoulders.

The main event hadn’t begun, but the din of treble voices was growing louder, meaning they must have been sitting there for some time and were growing restless. Before us at the other end of the room was a makeshift dais, raised to eye level with three or four collapsible church-supper tables in a row atop it, holding in all ten electric hot plates. The tables had been demurely covered to the floor with white cloths to hide chords, extensions and legs. High above all that and slightly back were two enormous oblong mirrors hung side by side horizontally and slanted so we all could follow the goings on from above, with a full view looking down on the cooking area, the top and back of the chef’s head, and the “back-stage” floor she would stand on. Eight or ten young women in pa-

per aprons like the one who first greeted us, mounted the “stage” and began fiddling with knobs and plugging in cords for the hot plates. They then uniformly placed an omelet pan on each, handle toward them. Through the mirror, with nothing else to do, we focused intently on the parts in their hair and slender shoulders bent over the burners, like anxious devotees awaiting the arrival of the high priestess for an arcane ritual – that in a sense, it was.

Julia Child’s weekly television appearances on Public Television had become ritual viewing for many of us. As such, certain myths had grown up around her and, true or not, clung to her on-air persona like old cobwebs. For instance, although she reigned supreme as the premier TV queen of gastronomy for years, she was not the first television cook. Dione Lucas was (singularly insisting all hamburgers be made with Angostura Bitters). And although she appeared to be rather clumsy – Julia was, after all, well over 6 feet tall with bruiser arms – she never actually dropped a duck on the floor as rumored (it was a potato pancake and it only fell partly off the pan, the rest on the counter), but maintained that only the cook in the kitchen would know if such an accident did occur and it was okay to pick it up, wash it off and go on. As for her legendary tippling, as when she raised a glass of wine at the end of every show with a warbly but hearty “Bon appetit!”, or when she sat at a table about to savor one of her dishes, and held up a half full glass indicating that such and such was the best wine accompaniment, it was a total sham. All the “wine” she ever sipped on air was actually watered down Gravy Master. And finally, the woman who called herself The French Chef was neither French nor a chef.

What she was, when eventually commanding the same prime-time slots as the likes of Milton Berle and Edward R. Murrow, was a truly American phenomenon, capturing viewers’ hearts from the beginning because, as *Gourmet* magazine once noted, “...her accomplishments extended well beyond her medium. She taught America how to enjoy food.”

Julia Carolyn McWilliams was born in Pasadena, California. Her father was a wealthy owner of mining and farming interests, but her mother’s family came from old New England money, and she seemed always to identify with the Northeast, graduating from Smith College in 1934 and planning to be a writer. She was an unsuccessful one (among her rejecters, *The New Yorker*.) During WWII she joined the Office of Strategic Services (later C.I.A.) as a

secretary who was then promoted and sent first to Ceylon, then China, following her husband-to-be Paul Child, an artist, photographer and bon vivant (and four inches shorter than she). After the war they married and Paul was redeployed to the American Embassy in Paris. Julia accompanied him, and there another myth (or not) began, that she was a spy for the U.S. government. She remained mum, but did admit to becoming a dedicated Francophile and champion of French cuisine after a taste of the simple dish *sole meunière* browned in Normandy butter for the first time, at Paul's recommendation, on a visit to Rouen. It was an epiphany of sorts. She became forever hooked on French cuisine.

Not content with mere *sole*, she enrolled in Le Cordon Bleu – never dreaming that 50 years later she would be the recipient of France's highest award, *Legion d'Honneur*. Beginning in 1951, she joined with two French friends on a decade-long research and writing project that ended up being the world-acclaimed *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, (incidentally rejected by Houghton Mifflin as too long, but snapped up by Knopf for a mere \$1500). When it finally got published and reached bookstores in 1961, she had to agree to promotional appearances. So she'd appear on television shows with a hot plate and omelet pan in tow, set up shop on any old surface with a plug and produce perfect results each time, happily explaining how she did it along the way, and in a voice that only Eleanor Roosevelt could love. Her easy personality and good humor captivated audiences immediately and led public television producer Russell Morash to recognize her potential and agree to give her a slot. Their collaboration would last over 30 years.

Her meteoric rise as a TV star began on WGBH, Boston's public television station. She called the half-hour program *The French Chef*, not to show off, but because those words were short enough to fit on one line in newspaper TV listings. With scant funding the show was filmed on the top floor of a moribund gas company warehouse in Cambridge that still had a demo kitchen set up. On each taping day Julia, Paul and devoted friends packed the trunk of their car with pots, pans, plates, and all the ingredients necessary for two shows – one taped in the morning, the other after lunch (consisting of whatever was cooked that morning). They'd haul everything up in an equally moribund freight elevator, and when the day's tapings were completed, wash the dishes and pans in the

toilet before carting all of it and the debris down again back in the car. For this, Julia earned \$50 an episode. The tapes were never edited or changed in any way, mistakes never reshot. For one thing, the cost of film was prohibitive and their budget too small for do-overs.

Her early dinners were not always as successful as her omelets, but she was smart enough to learn from them and make light of those mistakes (“only the cook knows what it’s supposed to taste like”). Everyone remembered them; her bloopers were exchanged next day around the office water cooler. She became the darling of the gay set, replacing Judy Garland.; her face once adorned a Time magazine cover and every third household on Fire Island had it gold-framed and on the wall above the cutting board by the next weekend draped in tea towels (a few of the lucky boasted autographs). Even my parents, bless them, in rural Massachusetts, decided to attempt one of her dinner recipes just as she demonstrated. My father wrote down the list of necessary ingredients and my mother took notes about the cooking. They labored over it for hours, trying to get it just right, and when they were done, exhausted but fulfilled, they toted up the bill and found the meal had cost the equivalent of almost a whole week’s food budget. They couldn’t spell it or pronounce it, or remember later how it tasted, but they never forgot what it cost.

That, then, was the high priestess who was about to grace the platform of the A & S attic for the delectation of bag ladies and balding groupies, several hundred strong, and famished (we hadn’t eaten a thing all morning). Suddenly, without a bit of fanfare, which was her wont, there she was in person emerging from the folds of the back-up curtain. To a standing ovation she lithely bounded up the steps to stage center with arms raised high overhead, repeating “Hello everybody, I’m Julia Child” several times, as if we needed to know. She was a good 8 to 10 inches taller than anyone around her, and instead of her regular TV attire of blue blouse with the Cordon Bleu medallion over a dark skirt and striped apron, she was in a very fancy dress, high at the neck and long in the sleeves, the background color of which was not unlike the Gravy Master she imbibed on her show. It was speckled all over with bright orange, yellow, brown and green beads that fitted the autumnal season if not necessarily the occasion. One of attendants wrapped a beige cloth apron around her waist, another clipped

a mike to her collar and she was off and running.

Two young men brought up some large canisters containing the egg mixture as well as a dozen crates of fresh eggs. Julia walked the length of the tables with a small bowl of water that she dipped fingers into and lightly flicked a few drops onto the omelet pans to test their heat. The last one wasn't as hot as she wanted, but she said it might be all right by the time she got to it. Walking back to the first, she asked an attendant to take a ladle and draw enough egg mixture out of a canister as would cover the bottom of the pan, and then repeated the instructions down the line. As one pan was filled, Julia made a little figure 8 in it with a fork and went to the next and did the same, and so on. By the time she got to hot plate 10, it was the right temperature and its pan got a scoop of mix.

Julia returned to the first one, lifted the panhandle slightly with one hand and struck it hard several times with the bunched fingertips of the other. The omelet slid to the bottom and flipped over on its other side. That was continued down the line. By the time she got back to the first again it was ready to slide off onto a paper plate held by another attendant, who handed it to yet another attendant who set it down on a separate side table, and another attendant cut the omelet into inexact cubes, each of which got its own paper plate and plastic fork and was placed on a large tray that, when filled was taken by yet other attendants down into the audience to begin distribution. And so it went, with dizzying speed. Whew! Talk about clockwork! Mrs. Child didn't stop talking or miss a beat during the entire hectic process, just wiping her hands and forehead occasionally on a tea towel tucked under her apron belt. When doing so, she exhorted us to always use a "perfectly clean towel" for that purpose and also to be sure, when clearing off the counter, to have a receptacle handy to catch all the debris. The audience, watching the reflected mess coagulate, reacted with snorts.

As we already knew, some of her harried helpers weren't always able to keep up, and by the time we had all been served, the floor under Julia (who was unaware of the overhead mirrors) was awash in gluey spilt mixture and shell fragments from eggs that had been broken to stretch it at the end. Too late it was learned there were no waste receptacles anywhere. The unfortunate helpers were slipping and sliding back there like they were on skates. One fell and rose dripping. All caught on mirrors. Debris indeed!

The scene brought to mind a famous photograph of her in the archives of the Schlesinger Library of the Radcliffe Institute of Harvard University (unavailable for copying). It was taken by Paul Child in 1963, the year ‘The French Chef’ was first broadcast on American television. The setting is the original fake demo kitchen in the old gas company warehouse. She stands left center in profile, leaning forward and talking intently to the unseen camera over the counter on which the usual cooking preparation stuff is spread out. Her head soars almost to the top of the picture that includes a corner of the room with high cabinets beyond. To the right, directly behind her is a narrow space and then a sink under a central fake window and more drawers and cabinets below. Her left hand is discarding a bit of food away from her that appears to the camera like it is being dropped down into a garbage disposal of some sort. Actually it is being caught on a dinner plate held over his head by one of five helpers with similar receptacles at the ready, all cramped cross-legged and hunched on the floor around and back of her to catch anything she discards from either side, out of sight of the viewer. It would seem to be déjà vu all over again in Brooklyn, without the foresight.

With the rest of us making the most of our little omelet cubes, Julia wiped her hands and face again with her doffed apron and high-tailed it off the platform with her hearty – “Bon appetit!” Over a loudspeaker an oily male voice announced she would be backstage to sign copies of her latest cookbook. As ‘guests’ scrambled (pun intended), Arthur and I sat staring at our pathetic little paper plates thinking nobody would believe we had breakfast with Julia Child. Least of all ourselves.

(At this writing a new Hollywood movie was about to be re-released called ‘Julie and Julia’ starring Meryl Streep as Julia (about a young housewife who decides to recreate every recipe in *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, with flashbacks to Julia’s early life. We wondered if any incidents like ours would be included. They would make a hilarious slapstick comedy.)

CATTLE CALL



In Hollywood and TV jargon they're called 'extras'; in operatic and dramatic performances they're known as 'supers', short for 'supernumeraries', a highfalutin word for nonperforming human entities needed to flesh out specific scenes; ones who don't need to move are referred to as 'wallpaper' or 'background filler'. Whatever the nomenclature, when they want work they seek ads announcing "Cattle Calls", meaning no particular talents needed, only the right look for the particular purpose – like mob scenes. No stand-outs need apply.

Just such an ad appeared in our local Nantucket Island newspaper the last week of September, 1995. It was noteworthy because the island had little history for being known as a setting for the kind of big movie studio filming the ad implied. For one thing it was too far away from the mainland for easy ferry transport of sensitive equipment, unreliable air flights and weather that could be fickle. Also islanders were traditionally an insular lot and not used to having their privacy invaded. But there it was, indicating that 300 people of all ages and types would be screened the next Saturday for possible background filler at The Harbor House, a hotel/cottage facility on the edge of town, for a major motion picture titled *To Gillian On Her 37th Birthday*. The full length feature would star Peter Gallagher, Michelle Pfeiffer and Claire Danes, along with Kathy Baker of TV's 'Picket Fences' fame and actor Bruce Altman.

Arthur Schaefer and I, partners in a print gallery at Old South Wharf on the harbor, sat outside our establishment under a spreading locust reading the paper, known affectionately as the newspaper it took one week to compose and three minutes to read.

There was the usual lull in foot traffic soon after Labor Day, so, with nothing more pressing to do, we decided to walk over and sign up. We were taken aback by the stream of movie hopefuls ahead of us, but filled out the applications anyway. What could we lose? We were told the applications would be reviewed overnight, so ‘don’t call us, we’ll call you’ rang familiar. Chosen applicants would have to sign for full days of filming (there would be approximately ten, give or take) and the pay would be \$60- \$80, paid in cash at the end of each day. Free lunch would be provided during the half hour noon respite.

When we had settled back into captains’ chairs outside the gallery again to await our destiny, we fell to reminiscing about our individual ‘super-ing’ experiences back in the day. Arthur recalled the summer of 1945 when, after the war but still in U.S. Army uniform, he was visiting a friend outside London. The friend, an actor, had a small role (of a god) in the first epic movie of any proportion to be made in post-war England, *Caesar and Cleopatra*. For kicks, he got Arthur an “extra” job on the set. The film was based on the play by George Bernard Shaw. Caesar was played by Claude Rains, Cleopatra by Vivien Leigh. The cast also included Flora Robson and a very young Stewart Granger. It boasted the most elaborate set in moviedom to date, and there were great expectations for it. Those were dashed when the critics and public got hold of it: too talky and not enough action; a plot reminiscent of Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle, but set back in ancient Egypt; clunky dialogue like – Caesar to Cleopatra, ‘You have been growing up since the Sphinx introduced us last night’. But the sets and costumes were wonderful.

When he settled back in New York, Arthur ‘super’ed every so often at the Metropolitan Opera House on Broadway between 39th and 40th Streets. He’d line up at the Stage Door right after work. That was an entirely different experience than being a movie extra. You really had to love opera to put up with the musty, badly lit backstage area, for one thing. The men’s changing section smelled like a locker room after a game. His favorite opera there was Verdi’s *Aida*, mainly for the thrill of being part of such a sumptuous spectacle. Unfortunately the costumes worn by ‘supers’ – mostly spear carriers – were anything but: ratty, baggy tights and moth-eaten tunics held together with safety pins. Being blond, he either had to wear a head covering or smelly black wig to look even re-

remotely Egyptian. But, hey, it was Show Biz. And he got a buck a performance to boot.

I also 'super'ed at the Met occasionally until the old opera house was closed in 1966. When it opened again at the new Lincoln Center, the old 'super' system was discarded. In its stead were union spear carriers with new dressing rooms and costumes that fitted and were well cared for. But my fondest 'super' memories were as a college student back in Boston, lining up at the stage door in all kinds of weather, as Arthur had, but for the touring companies of the Met, and also getting a dollar a show. My most vivid backstage moment was in Gustave Charpentier's *Louise*, the story of a shop girl from a country peasant family who is in love with an artist her parents reject, and they go off to Paris, which gets the better of them both and Louise succumbs to 'the pleasures and temptations of the enticing city'. It was just before the start of the second act, where we 'supers', dressed as Parisian students and urchins were huddled backstage awaiting our cue to go on, crowded in on all sides by the usual tangle of cable, canvas and light stands. The star of that night's performance was Dorothy Kirsten – my main reason for wanting to be there.

I had adored her from afar for several years, having watched her out front in an earlier traveling Met production of Puccini's *La Boheme*, and heard her on the Perry Como and Bing Crosby radio shows. (She would soon star in two Hollywood movies, *Mister Music* and *The Great Caruso*.) She epitomized, to my youthful mind, what a great opera diva should be: a stunning but remote blonde presence with a matchless lyric soprano voice and gorgeous body, able to act the sometimes preposterous roles given her with believable conviction. Her back-ground was a truly American success story. Born in Montclair, New Jersey, her mother was an organist and music teacher, her grandfather a conductor. She quit school at 16 to work, first at the Singer Corporation sewing company, then for New Jersey Bell. She studied singing in her spare time and eventually got a job with her voice teacher as a secretary and maid.

Kirsten became a chorus member on Kate Smith's radio program and on the side was a vocalist with several pop orchestras. Grace Moore discovered her and sent her to study in Rome, but her time there was cut short by the outbreak of World War II and she returned in 1939 to debut at the New York World's Fair.

From there her rise was meteoric, singing with one opera company after another, beginning with the Chicago Grand Opera, then the San Carlo Opera, New York City Opera, and, after a wartime radio program of her own, 'Keepsakes', the Philadelphia La Scala Opera, and at long last, the Metropolitan Opera, debuting there in 1945 in *La Boheme*. She would remain a Met star for 30 years, an almost unheard of record at the time. I attended her final performance of *Tosca* in December 1976.

My adoration for her began in my first year at Boston University College of Music in 1948. I tried to attend or 'super' in as many of her touring opera company appearances as possible. So it was with the eager anticipation of a dedicated idolater that I waited, in grease paint and smelly 'student' costume (the ones for touring companies were leftovers from New York), for Dorothy Kirsten to arrive backstage to go on. And then, there she was, almost beside me, her dresser arranging the curve-hugging blue gown in which she would make her stunning entrance into Paris. Her blonde hair hung loosely down her back and her smile was dazzling. She didn't seem to be nervous at all. She nodded her way past us to where a clutch of stagehands was resting against props. I went limp. They adored her as well. She leaned toward one of them intimately and said something in a low voice that made them all laugh – silently of course, we were backstage. The stage manager approached and hand-signaled her to get ready for her entrance. As she left the 'grips', one of them fondled her shoulder and kissed her on the cheek. I blanched. And as if that wasn't scandalous enough, another, to whom she'd whispered, actually patted her exquisite round behind and gave it a little tweak. The curtain parted, she smiled, threw them back a kiss and vanished to onstage Paris. I was mortified. What disrespect! That was a goddess they were bussing and tweaking there! Actually it was my own rude awakening to the fact that Show Business was, after all, a business, not a higher calling. The incident was no different than flirting at the office water cooler. I would 'super' again, but the illusions were gone. Even my costumes, symbols of that calling, were accepted for what they really were – dumb rags in disguise. After that, I did it mainly for the music. It never deceived me.

We enjoyed rehashing those early memories under the spreading locust on Old South Wharf, but even more the idea of being ex-

tras again after all those years. Arthur and I were both called at 8 the next Monday morning to appear immediately at the costume department. Hair unruly (Arthur's – I was already balding), unshaven and unwashed, we made our way over to a lot near our wharf, empty except for a large white truck with a ramp down to the ground in back and several other extras lined up at it. Inside the truck were racks of mixed clothing, shoes and hats. Two waiting attendants came to the edge and eyed us each carefully. The first extra was wearing stiletto heels and a tight cocktail dress. She was helped up the ramp to the dressing area in back. She came out with a slouch hat, torn jeans and a pair of sneakers, and signed the consignment paper – reluctantly. The next man looked okay after his tweed jacket was exchanged for a sweater. Our outfits passed muster, but we were told to remember what we had on (especially my wide-brimmed Indiana Jones straw) and wear the same each filming day. Then a smiling young lady with a clipboard checked off our names and pointed us toward Straight Wharf, the next one over from Old South, and there to ask for the casting agent.

We were brought to the area where the day's filming was to be done. There were already one or two hundred other extras milling about, trying to steer clear of boom cranes, dolly tracks, scissor lifts, klieg lights and heavy camera equipment being moved around the bricked pavement. Studio technicians in baseball caps and shorts were raising enormous sail-like sheets of white reflector screening. The action seemed centered on Straight Wharf's north side that was usually the mooring place for the local ferry service that plied the waters to and from mainland Cape Cod. There was a ferryboat already in place that was not only the first action setting, but also destined to be our meeting/resting place between takes. We were led up the ramp to the main deck of the vessel where an orientation session was already in progress. The film's director, Michael Pressman, was giving something of the history of the play and the evolved movie plot based on it. *To Gillian On Her 37th Birthday* began life as a stage play by Michael Brady, first produced by the Ensemble Studio Theater, Off Off Broadway in 1983. It was interesting for me to note that I was the director of the theater foundation that gave Ensemble its first grant several years earlier, so the current production had an added significance. From there it moved to Circle-in-the Square, also in Greenwich Village the next year. Pressman himself directed the play in Los Angeles in

1985. After that the play seemed forgotten – to everyone but him. Tenaciously he clung to the possibility of it becoming a film.

He connected somehow with co-producers Marykay Powell and David Kelly who put a package together with Kelly's wife, Michelle Pfeiffer as Gillian. The original plot centered around a man who had lost his wife in a boating accident off Nantucket Island. Two years later he was still on island unable to leave or give up the memory of their love. His family came together to help him let go of the past. In the play, Gillian was never seen, but considered the strong character that affected all the others. In the movie she is a ghost that only her husband sees. Pfeiffer agreed to do the cameo role of a ghost because she was busy then with her young growing family and didn't want to make a full stellar commitment.

The movie starts out two years earlier on her 35th birthday. She, her husband David (Peter Gallagher), a writer-teacher on the island and their teenage daughter Rachel (Claire Danes) are out sailing. Gillian climbs the mast and in a heavy wind falls into the sea and is lost, with David at the helm. Cut. Labor Day weekend two years later. David, still despondent, spends endless hours out on the strand communing with Gillian's ghost. They even make love. Rachel, his daughter, loves her dad but is very upset with his behavior, and contacts her aunt Esther (Kathy Baker) and her husband Paul (Bruce Altman). They show up on the island with a lady friend named Kevin (Wendy Crewson) who they hope might bring David out of his funk. They also offer to adopt the now motherless Rachel and take her away from Nantucket and her depressing father (as well as her nose-ringed boyfriend Joey [Freddie Prinze, Jr.], whom David despises). Summing it up, director Pressman stated that the whole point of the narrative is to make David realize that by keeping this fantasy alive he alienates his daughter, the only real love of his life now. In the end he promises to let go of his obsession and be reconciled with Rachel. After a melodramatic weekend the others hug, kiss, and depart as they came – by ferry. Hope springs eternal.

Arthur and I were split up; he to the wharf group, I to the boat group. Mine stayed on board the ferry and were sent to hug the rails on the upper deck in the brilliant fall sunshine. The vessel was backed up several lengths and slowly inched forward again to its mooring. We were told to wave enthusiastically to our 'relatives' awaiting our arrival on the wharf. I spotted Arthur among the land-

lubbers and threw both hands up in the air so he would see me. Obviously others were doing the same thing to get attention. The director stopped the action and shouted on his bullhorn to start over, without quite so much enthusiasm next time. Just one hand waving would suffice. ‘Remember, folks, you are just waving hello to your Aunt Millie. This is not the second coming of Christ!’ He also singled out one rather fey looking over- forty fellow in the very front row posing at the rail in an all-chartreuse day-glo ensemble – espadrilles, pants, jacket, flowing scarf and cocked beret – a gaudy fluorescence. We wondered how he escaped the wardrobe police. Pressman bullhorned him to retreat to the rear and next day report to the costume truck before coming to work. He went forlornly, poor chap. He must have spent weeks getting all those items dyed the same shade so he could stand out. He wouldn’t even make it to the cutting room floor.

We must have done better the next time, because the boat got tied down and ‘passengers’ began to debark from the back of the lower deck onto fixed wooden stairs that right angled down into the waiting throng of Aunt Millies. The first few women off descended with all the flair of an old Busby Berkeley number, sashaying and waving kerchiefs to the audience. No, no, no, blared the bullhorn. Everybody back on board! The boat was reversed again, and again, and again, with a change of frontrunners each return. Before we knew it was lunchtime and the scene had yet to be actually shot. We on board gingerly braved the metal stairs down to the main deck and took places on the rows of screwed down blue plastic seats, out of the relentless sun that was already affecting a number of bared heads up above. The wharf group joined us, and we were told that would be our home base for the duration. Any problems, there was staff on board to take care of it. Clothing, bags and packages could be left on the seats. The vessel would always be under 24/7 surveillance. At the end of each day we were to line up at the purser’s office at the rear for our pay – cash only and a signature of acceptance.

Best of all, it was our dining hall as well. Arthur plunked down in the blue scoop next to me as staff members came around with food carts, doling out a neat white cardboard box to each of us. Inside was a hefty meat sandwich (plain cucumber for dieters and vegans), a brownie, an apple and a bottle of soft drink or water (cold). Everyone dove in as if they’d actually been hard at work all

morning, excitedly talking to old friends and making new ones, recounting the morning's activities, or lack thereof. Some then stretched out across the seats while others knitted or read. Arthur and I went to the windows facing onto the wharf and watched as technicians repositioned enormous cylindrical klieg lights on wheeled stands to compensate for encroaching shadows.

Before allowing us to return to our positions, the director ordered a run-through with the principal actors alone. The scene calls for the relatives Esther and Paul, and Kevin (the lady friend they hope will arouse David's interest, but doesn't) to be positioned among the other arriving passengers on the rear lower deck of the ferry nearest the gangplank leading onto the wooden stairs. At the bottom of the stairs they are met by David alone. Hanging back are Rachel and a friend Cindy (Laurie Fortier), whose only reason for being in the cast seems to be so that Uncle Paul can come on to her and infuriate Aunt Esther at a formal but rowdy dinner party at David's beach house the next night. They pick up their luggage (excessive, it seemed to me, even for a long Labor Day weekend) and make their way with the crowd along the brick roadway in the direction of the town parking lot and the next setup.

At the sound of a whistle the extras stood, stretched and returned to their appointed places. The ferry was backed again, now with the principals on board, and the director yelled ACTION. Everything went smoothly until David, at the foot of the stairs, reached out around the female passenger preceding them to greet Esther and Paul. The female lingered too long gazing up at handsome Peter Gallagher (David). It caused him to flub a line and the emotional impact was lost. Back to the top of the stairs again, folks. Two more attempts and the scene was 'put to bed'. By then we extras were inured to the tedious ratio of movie making: 1 hour of waiting for every 10 minutes of action. I focused my waiting on the technical wizardry being performed all around us, almost not making it back to the ferry for four o'clock pay time after the day's shooting was completed. Others in line said quitting time had arrived none too soon.

Next morning, luckily the same beautiful day as its predecessor, we were back on Straight Wharf. The action would begin where it left off the day before, at the foot of the stairs, and continue with the principals making their way to the parking lot – a matter of several hundred feet – that became a full day's shooting. It

took several hours for the technicians to adjust lighting so it would replicate, early in the morning, what was last seen the previous late afternoon. Watching the magical transformation unfold was the best part of being there. Arthur was lucky enough to be seated alongside three of the stars during the long break: Peter Gallagher,



Arthur, Laurie Fortier, Peter Gallagher

Claire Danes and Laurie Fortier. He learned that Gallagher visited Nantucket as a young lad with his parents and had fond memories of it. He looked forward to seeing more of it in the ensuing days, having free time to wander the streets of the quaint town again and see Brant Point Lighthouse (where they would be filming subsequently), the neighboring

old Coast Guard Station, and the tiny village of (Sia) 'Sconset. Arthur was asked many questions about what it was like to live there. Were people always as pleasant as they had found them? Was it easy to get on and off the island? What about winters there (a question Arthur couldn't answer with any authority since he was a summer resident and only had been there at Christmas a few times, admitting it was so cold then he wouldn't want to do it again)? He related how, the last holiday he spent there, the electric power went off Christmas morning and wasn't turned on again for three nights. Since the electricity was needed to ignite the gas burners on the stove and start up the heating system for the entire house, temporary accommodations were available only at the town inn or the local high school that had their own generators. He and I ended up in the only available space, a tiny garret room under the inn's roof with only two single beds and one straight chair. Using the bathroom required stooping low beneath the eaves. It hadn't been used since summer, and the solitary window had been left open for ventilation. It currently took a maintenance man with a blowtorch to unfreeze it. It was also found that there was no heat in the room, and he had to schlep up an electric plug-in radiator that turned off when it reached a certain gauge level and never gave off anything but a peripheral glow. The inn's pub room was warm and toasty, however, and its cheery ambience and ample libations kept the collective thirst slaked. The darkness outside be

damned.

Arthur held his captive audience in thrall until the signal was given for the next scene. It was to begin, as noted, at the bottom of the stairs from the main deck. The principals took their former positions and the rest of us were sorted out and assigned places, some with luggage, and told that we were all to pretend we'd found their Aunt Millies, or equivalents, and, arm in arm (or equivalents), make our way happily along with the actors down the (unyellow) brick road from Straight Wharf to the town parking lot. Arthur was coupled with a plump blonde of a certain age, and as they walked, Peter Gallagher and his 'kin' came up alongside them. As he passed, he gave Arthur a friendly little elbow nudge out of the way that left Arthur, momentarily at least, the main attraction as he stepped aside with his lady and threw back a droll quizzical glance. There were many more takes to do, but that original one made it into the final film, and friends who actually went to see it told him he should definitely have got credits.

The short distance between there and the parking lot was an eternity, mainly because the crowd of extras doubled – all of us from the boat mingling with the milling mass already on the wharf. It called for a crowd choreographer, or an inspired traffic cop. Several of the crew had to use bullhorns to relate the director's commands down the line.

One lane of the parking lot had been closed to general traffic. The only two vehicles there were an open jeep that the cast was to use to go out of town, and my weathered white Pinto station wagon that the company rented for the actors to rest in between takes away from the sun's glare. I was paid another \$40 *per diem* for its use. It was a 'god-send', Kathy Baker scribbled on a note left on the dashboard. Also at day's end they all left a piece of fruit on the seat they occupied, usually an orange on each front seat and a banana, apple and pear in back. By week's end enough had accumulated for a tasty celebrity salad. Before the parking lot scene was completed, however, it was noon and all the extras went back to the ferryboat for lunch (the stars had theirs delivered to the Pinto). It so happened that day, October 3, 1995, was when the jury was expected to return their verdict on one of the most publicized criminal trials in U.S. history and the longest one in California history. Orenthal James Simpson, universally known as O.J. Simpson, was standing accused of the 1994 killing of his wife Nicole and

Ronald Goldman, a friend from the restaurant she frequented.

O.J. Simpson, born in July 1947, had been a superstar since youth. He was the most famous running back in football history, first with the USC Trojans and then for the Buffalo Bills, finally retiring from the San Francisco 49ers in 1979. Handsome beyond belief, his name was always in the news, and not always for the best reasons. A sometime TV sports announcer, he had recently embarked on a career in Hollywood films, commuting from his Rockingham estate. The bodies of Nicole and Ronald were found inside an entrance gate to the mansion. A world-televised police chase of the white van driven by a football buddy with him as a passenger was followed mile by mile, until he gave up and was taken to a local precinct. He claimed innocence, but there was so much evidence to the contrary – including a glove found at the scene that he tried to demonstrate on the stand was too small for his hand but was deemed otherwise, and so much more incriminating evidence, that the general public consensus was he would be found guilty, despite his expensive defense lawyers.

The captain of our ferryboat, knowing how interested we'd be in it, said over his intercom that the jury was just coming in with the verdict and he was going to broadcast it over the loudspeakers. There was an instant stillness as we sat munching our sandwiches and listening. The judge asked if the jury had reached a verdict, to which the foreman replied yes. When the judge told him to reveal it, there was a palpable pause, then loud and clear, Not Guilty. As if we had rehearsed it for weeks, all three hundred of us on two decks screamed out in unison – OH NO! It was a frightful and frightening moment, that so many of us had been affected with similar emotions so intensely. It was also depressing. The lunches were eaten in a desultory manner and many only half-heartedly returned to their appointed positions.

I was singled out along with the pleasant looking lady on my right, mainly because we seemed like a couple. Both were wearing Bermuda shorts and straw hats. She had a large shoulder bag and I was given a hefty cloth tote (full of crumpled tissue). When the cast arrived at the parking lot, we were instructed to walk slowly



Co-star Arthur at Lunch

away toward the exit, pointing out local things of interest to each other. The jeep would follow and pass us. As we came alongside the Pinto, I told her about the fruit. She wondered if, at that point, it was for eating or throwing. By the tenth start over we were opting for the latter. At last they got it right. The jeep caught up and skirted us with Gallagher driving. It stopped at the end of the lot. There a trailer was waiting with an exact duplicate ‘insert car’ attached at the back that allowed for the cameraman inside the trailer to film through the new jeep’s windshield in motion. The actors were positioned as they’d been (with help from still photos), and the trailer pulled away. Bumping over the cobbles up Main Street required other takes, with the police keeping traffic at bay. My fair lady and I remained in the carpark, spent and sunburnt. But by then we were out of it, except to return for one last reverse wharf shot, waving bye to those getting *on* the ferry who had welcomed us *off* it the day before.

During lunch on board before the O.J. Simpson incident, I learned the producers had found the perfect beach cottage for interior shots, but the owners refused. So they built a replica of it on the coast of North Carolina, planning to move the company there after the Nantucket scenes. The several ghostly moonlit beach encounters between Gillian and David were to be recreated in the cavernous – indoor – Spruce Goose Hangar in Long Beach, CA. Needless to say, the end result looked like the hybrid it was. Critics and public were not kind. Except for the crowd scenes and fine acting, everything got panned. The worst: ‘Never has a talented ensemble so wasted their time and ours’. Best: ‘A high class soap with Michelle Pfeiffer doing the shampoo commercials’.

We who answered the “cattle call” knew or cared nothing of that then. For us, it was an autumn diversion with maybe a tiny hankering for that ever elusive fifteen minutes of fame.

CODA: Double Don

The white Pinto station wagon that acted as a shelter for the Hollywood stars in the Nantucket town parking lot during the filming of *To Gillian on her 37th Birthday* in the fall of 1995 actually had an amusing afterlife of its own. In 2002, I drove it to the town dump in a remote section of the island called Madaket (affectionately dubbed ‘Madaket Mall’ for a fenced in ‘take it or leave it’

area where town residents could drop off and/or pick up second hand articles of clothing, books, furniture, dishes, etc). It was a beautiful Sunday morning in early fall, a time when it doubled as a local schmoozing place. There were people and cars everywhere. Arthur was in the passenger seat. I slowed to turn into a parking spot and the brake went limp to the floor. Unable to stop, the car jumped a high curb and crashed head on into a metal guardrail. Luckily at the moment no one was crossing in its path. Both dashboard and steering wheel airbags deployed in a miasma of sticky grey silicon dust that smelled awful and left us gasping. He punched his way out, opened the door for air, and fell unconscious on the ground. My fingers, white-knuckled, remained glued to the steering wheel until rescuers pried them off.

The fact that there were so many other 'trashers' around meant it was possible to get help almost immediately. Two kindly women wrapped car blankets around Arthur while one cushioned his head. Men led me out of the car and seated me on the curb. An ambulance and police car soon arrived and parted the crowd to get to us. Arthur was lifted onto a gurney and slid into the back of the ambulance. I sat dumbly on the bench beside him on the ride back to town. At the hospital he was found to be temporarily in shock and soon recovered. I ended up with broken bones at the base of my right hand and was in a cast for six weeks. I was determined never to drive that vehicle again.

The entire front end had been bashed in, but the engine and vital organs were intact. It was repaired and taken back to the car dealer for resale. But not by me. I had already purchased another used station wagon – bright red, in retaliation. An art gallery colleague said the new color reminded her of childhood days in Shanghai as the daughter of a missionary doctor. Houses of ill repute were required to be painted that particularly damning scarlet and she was told to cross to the other side of the road if she came upon one. Subsequently, when anyone asked me (needlessly of course) 'what shade is that?' the answer was invariably 'Chinese whorehouse red'.

One day soon after the incident, a phone call came from the Pinto's new owner, Don Russell. Don who? With an added 'n' on Don that was *my* moniker! And therein lay the tale of how the little white station wagon got to be owned by both Russells in succession:

Soon after I first arrived on Nantucket Island as a summer resi-

dent in 1970, I got a long distance telephone call very late one evening from somewhere in the West. In a laconic drawl I was told the caller had run into some bad times lately and asked if he could get a gig any time soon with my band. My what? Ain't this Don Russell the orchestra leader? No, sir, I'm an artist and sell paintings. Well, dammit! You must be Don Russell – I got the number from the long distance operator, and, man, I need a gig real bad. Can't you help me out? That *is* my name all right, but I'm not an orchestra leader and I don't have a band, honest. I paint pictures. Jeez, no orchestra? No orchestra. I can't help you. She-e-i-t!

Well, that was the beginning of the saga of the two Don Russells who lived on Nantucket Island – and eventually owned the same busted and repaired vehicle in succession. I had the caller wait while I looked up the name in the local phone book. I only found the one listed at my address, and unhappily had to tell him that. Not long afterwards there was a similar call from a bass player asking when he should arrive for the ball and if it was black tie. Bass player? Ball? Black tie? Intrigued, I decided to try to get to the bottom of the situation. Maybe the other Russell wasn't listed. Maybe he lived off island.

Ascertaining that a social occasion of some sort was imminent, I checked with the chamber of commerce. Sure enough, the local artists' association was having its annual do in the marvelous rustic barn that was its home – with music provided by Don Russell and his orchestra. I hung around all afternoon in the afore-mentioned parking lot across from the building until the musicians arrived for practice. At the first break I approached the leader and introduced myself. He stepped back in surprise and that was the beginning of a long and humorous relationship. He had been getting calls about artwork shown at local galleries (and eventually at my own) under that name, but referred them to whatever gallery and never gave it much thought until my appearance that afternoon. The reason I couldn't find him in the phone book was because he had himself and his wife Barbara listed on the same line as, but *after* that or his retired father who had been a prominent judge. (When his dad died, he had Barbara listed first, still dodging the most anxious calls I ended up getting: then he eventually settled for Don & Barbara Russell) For convenience I kept his number on a pad by my phone and he kept mine near his.

Don the bandleader was an open-faced affable fellow with an easy smile, as was his diminutive wife (she was one of those who were first to debark from the ferry onto that wooden stairway in the film). We didn't socialize, but often caught up at public functions or on the street and exchanged recent telephone tales. We especially enjoyed greeting each other loudly by name on Main Street in front of the 'unwashed', grinning and winking at their double takes. In my teens I was a featured singer on a highly popular CBS musical radio show, *Youth on Parade*, that was aired coast to coast Saturday 'mornings at 10 for nearly a decade beginning in 1940. Don the bandleader, who was into drumming even then, was an avid listener with his brother. He didn't remember me by name (what?), but knew our young master of ceremonies who was from his own Wellesley, Mass. high school named Milton Grubbs.

My favorite phone story came from a socialite who, in midsummer, was planning her daughter's fall wedding. She called in July, saying she was doing it early to make sure I wouldn't be already booked so I could play at the reception. Telling her I didn't 'play' made her a little huffy. 'Of course you play! I myself have heard you and your ensemble and you'll be simply perfect for Gloria's wedding.' As I kept reiterating my reasoning, she kept insisting I was simply being evasive. I repeated Don the bandleader's number, telling her it was listed in his father the Judge's name. She said she knew the judge perfectly well and was sure *he* wouldn't have a son who led a *band*. We ended the conversation with her insisting I show up on such-a-such future day to go over the music. Money was no object. I told her I would relay her message to the 'real' Don Russell and hung up, frustrated and a little baffled. I relayed the entire conversation to him and he chuckled over the lady's boneheaded persistence and said he'd handle it.

That seemed the last of it, and I'd long forgotten the whole business until early September when an engraved invitation arrived by mail inviting me to attend – guess who's wedding? In the RSVP I said I would not be able to attend either the nuptials or the reception following at the 'Sconset Casino (a musty gathering place for the anointed who dwelt among the tiny – but quaint – cottages at a far reach of the island: a group of Boston Brahmins who still believed the Cabots spoke only to the Lodges, and the Lodges only to God – and them). Then several weeks after the event the mother of

the bride phoned and indignantly upbraided me for the no-show. I told her I had no idea who she was, had never seen her before, didn't know her daughter, and wasn't in the habit of attending total strangers' affairs. 'But we're *not* total strangers. We've conversed-' pause, 'by phone!' I gave up.

In later years Don the bandleader developed serious health problems and retired from 'waving the wand'. The supplicant midnight calls ended. I missed them in a way. They made for good story telling. When he began feeling stronger, he and Barbara sometimes visited the print gallery I ran by then on Old South Wharf. There were editions of satirical black silhouette 'cut-outs' of Early Americans I'd recently created. When they found out one contained Benjamin Franklin (with kite and lightning bolt), they nearly bought out that edition. It seemed that Franklin's mother Abiah Folger was born in 1667 on Nantucket Island, and was one of Don's forebears. She was the second wife of Ben's father Josiah, a Boston tallow chandler. They produced 17 children, Benjamin being the 15th. On the Madaket Road between town and the aforementioned dump there was even an oval stone horse font erected (now planted with seasonal flowers) and above it a plaque dedicated to Abiah's memory. Almost every year after that Don the ex-bandleader would appear at the shop with a fresh growth of grandkids in tow, all to receive their own Benjies.

As oftentimes happens in the arts, the ex-bandleader's star waned as mine brightened. He was seldom remembered as the Peter Duchin of Cape Cod and the Islands he had been, while I gained increasing prominence from art work on view at my wharf gallery, the internet and television. Quietly he and Barbara retired to a fine new home in the meadows on the way to Abiah and Madaket, with the old white Pinto nestled in the wildflowers of summer. He phoned in the fall of 2007 to say they had driven it out to see Sankaty Head Lighthouse being spectacularly inched from its eroding cliff edge to a new site. While conversing, a bystander asked his name. 'Don Russell'. 'You mean the famous artist?' Not caring to elucidate further, and after half a lifetime of being joined at the hip, he simply replied, 'Yes'. I got it.

DAYS OF MY YOUTH / THE QUEST

PART ONE: DAYS OF MY YOUTH

What I remembered most about that July in 1943 was not the war, in spite of all the rationing imposed on my family – gasoline, shoes and eventual food coupons; meatless Tuesdays and Fridays; margarine mixed with packets of orange coloring to pretend it was butter; coffee that was mostly chicory; no sliced bread; and those despised new pennies made of zinc-coated steel to replace the beloved old coppers needed for manufacturing munitions. I'd already accepted all that and more as part of the larger, amorphous and seemingly endless condition called "the war effort". No, it was music, the secret sensuous late night kind that came from a short wave radio kept near my pillow and played softly so that no one back in the house would know I was still awake.

I had recently turned 14 and slept summer nights on the hand-nailed slab bunk in my so-called "studio", a long slant-roofed structure, originally a henhouse and later appropriated by an uncle as a kennel for his hunting dogs. When he went off to war and got killed, my dad gave away the animals and the two of us converted it into a private Xanadu. The push-out windows along the highest, south facing side had to be scraped clean of decades of grime and plucked chicken fluff to let in light. Garlands of tough cobwebs that stiffed the slightest breeze needed to be broomed off the rafters. Dad found a forgotten multi-paned picture window half buried by hay in the barn and fitted it into the far wall surrounded by bookshelves. Very cozy.

It was a wonderful place to create paintings and sculptures (at the moment recumbent humanoids with big holes through them *a la* Henry Moore). But more than that it allowed me to return there after supper and goodnights in the main house, snuggle under the covers, alone in the dark, and listen to local stations until the distant church bell struck 10. Then I could switch to short wave and search the far off Chicago powerhouse station WGN, ignoring the crackle of static to catch the familiar announcement I knew by heart, "...from high atop the Regency Hotel you're listening to the sweet sounds of the Glen Miller Orchestra...", or Wayne King,

Tommy Dorsey, Guy Lombardo, Dick Jurgens, Harry James, Kay Kyser, Benny Goodman, Sammy Kaye, Jimmie Dorsey, Duke Ellington – I knew them all by their signature styles.

Six nights a week WGN broadcasted from the Aragon Ballroom (my favorite), with occasional special shows from the Edgewater Beach Hotel or the Savoy. The names themselves conjured up such exotic remoteness. They were all part of that glittering glamorous life I could only ache for, buried as I was in the backwater hamlet of West Medway, an hour and a millennium away from Boston. Un-reality became reality – visions of tuxedos and elegant gowns of my own design undulating across an expanse of dance floor that reached out of sight beneath a ceiling as high as the sky; band members in matching blazers buying smokes on their breaks from cigarette girls with Betty Grable legs, and giant gilded blackamoors in mirrored turbans lining the curved staircases where they trod. What a life!

Until the early 1940s most of the solo singers were male, but when ‘orchestras’ became ‘dance bands’, females were added for visual appeal. They were called ‘standup vocalists’ initially because they usually sat decorously to one side until time for their solo bits, when they would ‘stand up’ behind a mike, sing a chorus, then sit down again. As time went on and female vocalists became famous in their own right, they were known as ‘featured singers’ and walked onstage to do their numbers and then off again. I was more partial to the ladies than the men. I loved to fantasize about how they looked and dressed and smiled. Connie Boswell, the Clooney sisters (Betty and Rosemary), Patti Page, Helen O’Connell, Helen Forrest, Anita O’Day, Kay Starr, Peggy Lee, Margaret Whiting, Jane Morgan and Keely Smith were all favorites. That was until one young man appeared on the scene who erased their images. I knew what he looked like from cover photos on drug store magazines like Radio Guide and Radio Mirror. He was gaunt, with sunken cheeks and a double-breasted slouch, and at one performance earlier in 1943 had drawn an audience of over 30,000 ‘bobby-soxers’ screaming and fainting all over the old Paramount Theatre in New York City. I identified with him, at least in appearance, but little did I know that Frank Sinatra would impact so closely on my immediate future. By the end of that summer I had decided that I wanted to be an actor, or maybe a singer. I was from a family that loved music, sang

in choirs and played instruments for as long as I could remember. Never considered a promising boy soprano, it came as a complete surprise to them – and me – when my voice changed at 13 to a rich deep baritone with singing potential. I gained experience and confidence with choir, minstrel show and wedding reception solos. I had also taken part in a local theater group called The Medway Players, creating adolescent roles that earned enough notice to make me think about an acting career. So which one to follow first? I chose acting and enrolled in Saturday classes at the landmark Leland Powers School of Speech and Drama in Boston. It was then a somewhat fusty but friendly haven for the “theah-tah” arts, redo-lent of grease paint and backstage clutter, with classes taught by mainly retired professionals, British accented and eccentric enough to make us young hopefuls believe they were the real things. One of my teachers wore evening gowns, a pince nez and sneakers. To class.

Halfway through the first semester a notice was pinned to the bulletin board announcing auditions for the chorus of a popular weekly teenage radio musical program called ‘Youth on Parade’. Thinking to conquer two careers with one stone, I made my way to the Tremont Street studios of Radio Station WEEI Boston with a mixture of cheekiness and trepidation. The immediate shock on getting off the elevator on the 2nd floor was the palpably dense silence that pervaded the reception area, a far cry from the midday cacophony back on the busy thoroughfare. ‘SILENCE - ON AIR’ signs flashed all over. The receptionist wore rubbers over her pumps and held an index finger upright against her lips in a silent Sh! You could lose sight of your shoes in the dense grey wall to wall carpeting. It was my first encounter with indirect lighting, and it took a moment to adjust to the relative dimness.

I was led through two sets of thickly padded doors into a glaring hermetically sealed chamber whose walls and ceiling were covered with what looked like white pegboard. A low narrow platform was set up on the left with overhead boom mikes for the chorus members. To the right rose another stepped back platform on which ten or more musicians sat waiting with instruments in hand. In the center were three or four separate mikes spaced well apart, and in the wall beyond a sound-sealed picture window in plain sight of everything, behind which the station announcer, dir-

ector and sound technicians sat at monitors with headphones. To the right of the orchestra was a raked gallery with rubber tipped chair legs for a small audience (non-existent at the moment) and a large flashing red APPLAUSE sign high in front of it. A Medusa head of cables snaked across the rubber tiled floor, coursing around the precisely placed mikes and music stands. Technicians scrambled everywhere. First impression: orderly, cramped chaos.

There were twelve of us hopefuls nervously lined up on the long narrow chorus platform. Most were teenage girls of varying shapes and sizes with hair in then stylish pompadours with long straight sides and back curled up at the ends. Each boy, including myself, sported long pomaded hair slicked straight back into a hip DA (Duck's Ass). Suddenly the door opened outward, sucking air with it, and in walked Dolphe Martin, the music director, a stolid fifty-ish fellow with kinky hair the color and texture of steel wool, a parrot beak of a nose, and black-rimmed glasses. He wore a business suit that matched his hair. His smile was a thin grimace. Beside him and half a foot taller was the star of the show, Ruth Casey, billed as a teenager, who, we newcomers agreed, had waved goodbye to that category ages ago. Rail-thin with a long face and teased dark hair, she reminded me of an efficient secretary in high heels, skirt and blouse with sheaves of music perpetually clutched to her flat chest. Her overly painted lips and eyes were the only theatrical giveaways. An enlarged gauzy headshot of her with stars in her eyes graced the downstairs lobby. Aloof as always, she picked her way over the cables and found a chair well apart from the proceedings. I don't believe she ever fraternized with us *hoi polloi* more than once or twice during my years with the show. But she always looked like a cool million (as if anybody could tell on radio), and, we also had to confess, possessed a remarkable sultry voice that caressed microphones.

Martin was all business from the start. He passed out sheet music and gave us five minutes to go over it. Then, instead of hearing each of us solo, he struck up the orchestra and led us as a chorus in four part harmony. During the process he weeded out the obvious misfits and ended with only four of us for permanent inclusion in the ensemble. The next day he incorporated us into the regular chorus to hear how we blended on the theme song, *Beyond the Blue Horizon*, that rousing favorite by Richard Whiting (Margaret's father) and Leo Robin, written originally for Jeanette MacDonald.

I never heard the song in later years without remembering how he insisted on a break between d in *beyond* and t in *the*. “No slurring, no slurring”.

“Beyond-ah the blue horizon, waits a beautiful day....”, not
“Beyonthe blue...”

He was a stern task master, but treated us as adults and managed to instill in us the pride of perfection. He never played favorites, but chose soloists like myself only when he was certain that we were ready.

The other Young America Choristers, as we were called, were an amiably wary lot, idling for their chance to rev up to speed—one eye on the director, the other on who was getting the lion’s share of the solos. There was little opportunity for close friendships, since we were from all over and got together no more than three or four hours a week, practicing full time. However, a few trivial episodes stubbornly stuck in my memory long after they should have. One involved neckwear. Hand painted ties were the rage then and I’d made one I was especially proud of and wore it to rehearsal. A tall strapping fellow baritone, considered very “hot” by the treble contingency, wore one too, and on a break the girls voice-voted which was nicer. His won of course, but years later I could still see the snicker on the face of one of the “judges” as she flipped my tie up at my nose in passing. (I soon got even, however. Coming of age, he was drafted into the army, leaving me heir to all his solos.)

We were paid a dollar a week, doled out by the lady at the outer desk with the rubber heels, meant for commuter fares to and from the studio. In my case I had to take the train or bus from West Medway each Friday afternoon for a 5 P.M. rehearsal, released early from school by a sympathetic principal who was nuts about show biz and had a son who was a screenwriter in Hollywood. Afterwards I’d trolley out to the suburb of Arlington to overnight with an uncle and aunt, rising early enough the next morning to return to the studios for the final 9 o’clock run-through on the 2nd floor that lasted right up until air time.

On the permanent weekly roster of ‘Youth’ along with Ruth Casey was a sister act: identical singing triplets – identically dressed – who had been trained professionally like her (probably by Martin) and were also well past the mid-teen category, but far more

congenial. A (supposed) 12 year old “kid” announcer, Milton Grubbs, introduced a dramatic segment each week devoted to great Americans or upbeat ‘now’ patriotic themes, from scripts by a station hack. We were all required to participate, but considered it utter drek, rolling our eyes and making salutes that ended in nose-thumbing or self gagging gestures. We were professionals, don’t you know, and above that drivel. Grubbs also seemed to age rapidly before our very eyes. The whole “teen” emphasis was a bit ludicrous. We had been told that the Federal Communications Commission insisted that all the major city stations produce upbeat ‘America First’ programs slanted toward middling 13 to 17 year old listeners. Some of the choristers were also well over the age themselves by then, as was, of course, the entire adult union orchestra. But, it being radio, no one ‘out there’ was any the wiser. We were, to them, an ageless troupe of disembodied voices.

Dolphe Martin tended to choose his soloists for their vocal similarities to current well known popular artists. The trio echoed the Andrews Sisters, etc. Ruth Casey could have been any of the current big-name canaries. There was a petite blonde (actual) teenage soprano from Saugus with an acne problem and a beautiful coloratura range who was another Deanna Durbin. And then there was yours truly. At first he insisted on billing me as ‘Donny Russell, that youngster with the big voice’ (at a lanky 5 foot 10, with an Adam’s apple!) and I was given humorous patter songs to interpret, like the ever-popular *Myrtle the Turtle and Flip the Frog*, a dopey number by the Korn Kobblers, ‘America’s Most Nonsensical Band’, who had turned it into a hit after a sold-out performance at Rogers Corner, New York City (later named Madison Square Garden) in the fall of 1942. They were famous for incorporating jugs, washboards, auto horns, whistles, mouth harps, duck quackers, you name it, into the orchestration. Music Director Martin followed suit. I despised singing it, but it was one of the air-wave audience’s most requested encores.

*‘Myrtle the Turtle and Flip the Frog lived on Lily Pond Lane,
They slept a lot when the sun was hot, but they stepped out in the
rain...’ Errr!*

Then one Friday when I showed up at rehearsal sporting a double breasted ‘zoot’ suit, jacket slung low, a skinny tie loosened be-

low, a skinny tie loosened below an open-collared white shirt and a pork pie hat tipped over one eye, the company immediately got who it was and laughed and applauded – even the band. After that, Martin revamped me into his Sinatra clone and I got to croon much nicer tunes. The impersonation was carried over into the live shows we did for the military at Camps Deven and Edwards the next year, and the next. All I needed to do was slink onto the stage with an unlit cigarette in one hand and thrust the other in my pants pocket and, without a note being sung, the audience rocked. I got the same reaction walking on from the wings during a benefit staged for wounded vets at the spectacular but doomed old National Theatre on Tremont Street – two gilded balconies, red plush interior, seating for over 3,000 – while guest star Ida Lupino (she of the “Roadhouse” B films fame) was doing a ‘reading’, perched on a stool in a slit-skirted blue gown by Adrian of Hollywood, draped to hide an ankle cast from a recent fall. I sauntered slowly toward her, then did the hand-in-the-pants-pocket bit, and began serenading her.

But the uproar from the audience was such that the skit broke up with both of us in hysterics. Lupino, originally from England, was at the height of her stardom, and a tireless USO entertainer of the troops as well as one of the regulars of the Hollywood Stage Door Canteen in L.A. all during the war. I heard an am-vet years later say in an interview he would never forget her warm kindness. Neither would I.

During and just after the war, ‘Youth On Parade’ did its bit, touring and performing on weekend gigs to schools, veteran hospitals and local theaters, at bond rallies and to distribute its own awards. It gave one last live “blowout” performance to celebrate the war’s end, again at the National Theater with the Young America Choristers featured in numerous set changes and choreographed numbers. The finale showed us in splashy calypso costumes, our palms wiped with “invisible” paint that glowed when the stage/house lights were doused. We moved them rhythmically in what looked like free floating hands dancing in the dark to the music of a foot-pounding rendition of Robert MacGimsey’s spiritual-based romp from 1931, ‘Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’, (lyrics from the Book of Daniel, and first sung by Louis Armstrong). It was a night like none other as orchestra, singers and audience clapped hands and lustily bellowed: ‘Old Nebudchanezzar was the king of

Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego...'

The actual peace treaty was signed in the spring of 1945, but all performing units continued to play for the "boys" well into 1946, especially at the many full up hospitals scattered around New England. 'Youth on Parade' remained active, but there were rumblings that all the upbeat wartime radio programs would soon be Xed by the FCC. And so they eventually were, but most of us in the cast resented the way it was finally sprung on us by Martin and the producers. We rehearsed as usual, unknowingly, on what would be our last Saturday, and performed the show with no mention to the radio audience, or us, of its imminent demise. We gathered our things as usual and were in the outer lobby waiting for Ms. Rubber Heels to pay up. She said she was sorry, but it was all over, and she was not given any travel money to distribute. Wonderful knowing you all. Goodbye. We were flabbergasted.

Dolphe Martin emerged with Ruth Casey in tow, and I lit into him, summoning all the pent-up anger and frustration that had been building for a year. The rest of the cast joined in. It was an ugly scene, one of which I was later ashamed. That such a unique opportunity for bringing temporary joy and relief to audiences craving both should end like that was despicable. But I and the others felt he had somehow betrayed our trust by waiting to the last minute and then letting a receptionist be the bearer of the bad news as he and Casey wordlessly stepped into the down elevator. 'What does he think we are, chopped liver?' Ms. Saugus wailed rhetorically. The troupe laughed, wept, hugged, shrugged – and disbanded.

It closed a unique chapter of my adolescence, on which I could look back with the pride of fulfilling an unlikely dream. They were certainly not wasted years. They'd instilled in me an abiding respect for music and music making. I continued piano and vocal lessons during the last year of high school, and then entered Boston University's College of Music to study musicology. But the more I studied, the less I enjoyed. So after a year and a half, and one last decisive summer back in the henhouse, I left for New York, attended Pratt Institute and the Art Students League, and began a long career in the visual arts.

(Anecdote: Some time after having moved away, I returned to West Medway to visit my folks. As I stepped off the bus, a lady whom I'd seen in the neighborhood, but didn't know, was getting

on. As she passed me she smiled and said, “Oh, Donny, I heard you last Saturday on the radio and you were never better.” I thanked her, the bus drove off, and then it hit me: I hadn’t sung a note on the air for years!)

PART TWO: THE QUEST

I was a latecomer to advanced technology . I didn’t even own a driver’s license until I was 40, or a motor vehicle until five years later. I didn’t have to. I lived in Greenwich Village in winter and starting in 1965 spent the warm half of each year on Nantucket Island off Cape Cod and rode everywhere in both places on bicycles. It was the easiest way to tackle meandering Village streets with stacks of paintings on front and back headed for Washington Square at outdoor exhibit times, and for getting to and from a midtown Nantucket studio and a wharf gallery on the harbor. The second-hand station wagon was a reluctant addition for hauling fragile and oversize artwork around the island. Likewise, it wasn’t until I’d grown weary after six years of writing a book about Off Broadway theater with tedious cut and paste methods, that I bought my first computer and hired a pro to teach basics. It was 1996, fifty years from the days of my youth – on ‘Parade’. Before that, I might have occasionally recounted a few incidents about that era or sung the theme song in the shower, but, at 67, I wasn’t overly obsessed.

Then that summer on Nantucket, though still involved in the art scene there and the performing arts foundation I’d co-founded in New York in 1965, I began harking back to the show more frequently, just, I told myself, for nostalgia’s sake. Or was it? At first it entailed jotting down random notes from memory about some of my solos back in the day, to see if I still remembered lyrics, beginning with my mother’s favorite, *Just a Prayer Away*, composed by David Kapp in 1944 and Charles Tobias, first introduced by Sammy Kaye and later made popular by Bing Crosby. It came out at a time in World War II when the Battle of the Bulge was raging in Belgium, my uncle was lost in action, and hopes for early peace were diminishing. Unabashedly sentimental, meant to reflect the thoughts of the troops:

*There’s a happy land somewhere, and it’s just a prayer away.
All my hopes and dreams are there, and it’s just a prayer away.*

*Where the skies look down on a friendly town filled with laughing
children at play,
There's a happy land somewhere, and it's just a prayer away.*

Some lines I needed to look up and a few early incidents were hazy, but then they'd all been sketchy memories I'd carried around as theatrical baggage for half a century, retold by rote. Precise details once so clear in my mind at the start were definitely becoming blurred with the passage of time, to the point of seeming illusory. Had they ever existed? Was there ever such a program on the air? Was it WEEI or WHDH? Saturdays at 10 or Fridays at 6? Tremont or Boylston Streets? – Was it age? – Fearing I was becoming delusional, I took to the Internet seeking answers. At first it revealed, to my horror – nothing! Absolutely nothing! Every search for facts came up goose eggs. Even calls to station affiliate archives yielded no results. Libraries were no help. It seemed reconciled to it being the figment of an early imagination embellished with real-life situations to make it believable – even to me. But still, over the next decade the other half of me doggedly continued the quest anyway, gut-certain that it was more than mere boastful adolescent fiction. It *had* to be. For sanity's sake. At length, after a last desperate e-mail appeal for help to fellow radio buffs, one of them suggested that I contact Donna Halper, an author, historian and assistant professor of Communications at Lesley University, Cambridge, MA, who was a recognized authority on early radio broadcasting. I sought her out immediately. It didn't take long for a reply, but she indicated from the first in an e-mail on October 6, 2007 that she felt she was being sent on a wild goose chase (those geese again), but had found an obit from the Boston Globe dated April 8, 1987. It told of the death of one Eileen Casey, a noted Broadway choreographer and model, who also worked as talent coordinator for her sister Ruth Casey on the "Youth on Parade" TV series 1955-1970. It listed among surviving family members, Ruth Casey-Martin (hyphenated). Was it relevant?

It was clearly not the radio version of 'Youth', but the names were certainly the same. Ruth Casey must have married Dolphe Martin at some point. It was a tiny glimmer of light in decades of darkness, and rekindled sagging hopes. I concentrated thereafter on Dolphe Martin, and later in 2007 found that he had written incidental music and conducted the orchestra and choir for the play

with music, *Roll Sweet Chariot* that opened at the Cort Theatre, New York City in October 1934, set in Potters' Field – a Negro Village in the South. He also composed music for *Rainbow House*, a radio show with host Bob Emery. His published compositions included 'Once More With Feeling', 'Foolish Pride', 'Season of Love', and 'Greetings From Home', one-time theme for the radio program YOUTH ON PARADE" – *the very first mention found about our show!* The same source (American Copyrighted Songs Since 1900) added: born in Poland and died October 3, 1974. Casey was a widow at of her sister's funeral.

Giddy with promise, in mid-2007 I actually stumbled upon a brief notice on The Billboard Weekly web site dated May 15, 1943, that read: '**YOUTH ON PARADE CBS Sat. Mornings; started on WEEI Boston under Dolphe Martin with Milton Grubbs, 12, announcer. Two years ago went Coast to Coast**'. There were also notices from later editions about our troupe's far flung bond drives.

The Billboard Weekly was, and remained, the 'holy grail' of the entertainment world. It certainly was mine. The term 'Coast to Coast' changed everything. I'd forgotten we were on nationwide. Dropping the local Boston area search, I began surfing the CBS national network systems. But it still took two more years to find a bona fide article reviewing it at length. That came on another hunting expedition via the Internet on the tenth of November, 2009. Like many an archaeological find, it was hiding in plain sight all along. And just like any important trove, it made all the previous doubtful digging worthwhile:

Vol. 56 NO. 34 **THE BILLBOARD** Sept. 23, 1944
The World's Foremost Entertainment Weekly
Style – Variety WEEI – CBS
Reviewed Saturday 10-10:30 am

For a show in which all the performers are teenagers YOUTH ON PARADE is a pretty slick article. What was heard was the 111th program piped to the network from the Hub. The formula is set, employing a big, well-balanced singing ensemble, large orch [sic]. several fine soloists, a sketch of a kid's mythical adventures plus the Youth on Parade Award for Outstanding Achievement.

Set pattern naturally limits the range of material as well as the base of interest, but within the framework the kids do very well indeed. For a tight morning show, intros and buildups are pretty pretentious [sic]. The first half leans too heavily on the undeniably exceptional singing of teenager Ruth Casey, whose solos and style put many an airways canary to shame. Four songs in 15 minutes are too many for anyone, especially one so young. This includes listeners too. If the kids were not so sophisticated and professional, the gags in Johnn Graf's script would not sound quite so self-conscious; like veterans, (they're) considerably removed from the naiveté of their material. Since the show is designed for youngsters, dramatizations of fictional or real adventures and noteworthy experiences of teenagers would be more appropriate and more, interesting.

The Youth on Parade Award for shot heard [sic] was to the late Gen. Theodore Roosevelt*. It was cast in embarrassing sentimental, yet nevertheless ear-jerking language. Here again, awards to young people for their achievements might be more appropriate. But, despite reservations, Parade is a smoothly produced, tightly knit and nicely performed show. Dolphe Martin, originator and moving spirit, Ray Girardin, producer, Frank Bastitzia, musical director, Hal Newell, announcer. Actual performance has a teenager as announcer – Milton Grubbs. *Eldest son, Pres.Theodore.Roosevelt,vet 2 WWs, died 7/12/44

Halper (helper?) added the clincher: "Not only had 'Youth on Parade' been on the air as early as 1942 – it appeared in late 1941 with a slightly different name: 'March of Youth'". At last! Sanity restored, I could go on belting its familiar theme at 80 as I had at 14, relieved it was more than just a pretty tune:

*Beyond the blue horizon Waits a beautiful day, Goodbye to things
that bore me, Joy is waiting for me.
I see a new horizon, My life has only begun. Beyond the blue
horizon Lies a rising sun.*

New York City, January 2010

DIVA

Like most neighbors living in the same apartment house, seen occasionally on passing in the halls and friendly but not intimate, you know them and you don't. That was the way with Albert ("don't call me Al") who lived a floor beneath us and on the other side. We saw him, and then we didn't. But when we did, conversation resumed as if no time had passed. 'What's new?' 'Nothing.' And so it went, year after year. We didn't even know his last name. Never asked. The building was on Downing Street in Greenwich Village, not to be confused with *the* Downing Street in London – of course. And being the Village, you got to accept a way of living you probably wouldn't tolerate any place else. For example, my roommate Arthur and I lived on the top floor of a six floor walkup in a so-called railroad flat – four rooms in a row: living room (with fireplace and windows on the street); kitchen (where you entered from the hallway, with a fridge, bath tub, sink, stove, and heater under a window facing a communal courtyard shared with three other buildings and connected by a cat's cradle of clotheslines); dining room (usually doubling as a large closet); and bedroom (with bunk beds away from a wall that tended to 'waterfall' on cold nights). We shared a pull chain toilet in the hall with an elderly couple who lived opposite. It was 1958 and the cost was \$25 a month – heat extra. In winter we hardly kept warm. Summers at the top were so stifling that candles, in a brass chandelier Arthur cobbled together from odd parts, drooped over like spent cocks.

One day out of the blue, during one of our hallway encounters, Albert asked if we would like to come for dinner one evening. We would be delighted. And so it was arranged. We arrived early on the appointed night, to find him sweating profusely under a tee shirt with a drawing of Maria Callas's face on it and *DIVA DIV-VINA!* scrawled beneath. (A home-made job, I reckoned.) Two black-faced cats circled us, snarled and slunk away. The apartment was three very small rooms: the entry kitchen where he had been slaving at the stove, the living room, and what we surmised was the bedroom behind a closed door. It was all arranged for the convenience of the two Siamese: in the living room was a sofa that had seen better days, with armrests ragged from clawing, and chairs with legs scratched raw. There were random bowls of water

everywhere and a kitty litter box under the kitchen window. Above the aromas from the stove, the place had the indelible smell of cats. Albert seemed to adore them and they him. It was a cuddly *ménage à trois* ('just three mean kitty-cats'), and probably why we never saw anybody else go in or out of the place as we went past.

Another reason might have been his penchant for playing recordings so loudly that it hurt the ears even out in the hall. Opera, yet. The phonograph cabinet was set between the two living room windows where on top votive candles flanked a framed head shot of the woman on his chest. Otherwise the room, though cramped from overstuffed furniture, seemed comfortable and ordinary. Albert brought in drinks and shouted over the din that the recording was a new one by Maria Callas singing Bellini's *Norma*. Did I know the opera? Yes, I shouted back, but never saw it. He indicated the sofa for us, and flopped into an opposite wing-back 'for a little breather', handing me the album cover. Others would arrive shortly.

Scrutinizing him in a setting other than the hallway, he was a little like his furniture: slightly overstuffed, but not bad looking, with a head of wavy black hair and expressive brown eyes. About thirty. About my height. He was unusually fidgety and high strung. Said he didn't often have people for dinner. He gestured wildly as he talked, and every time Callas hit a high C in *Norma* he stiffened his head back and thrust one arm straight ahead, pointing a finger as if landing the note himself somewhere in my lap. He was obsessed by everything to do with the diva: had every recording she ever made, kept scrapbooks of personal data, and was a walking encyclopedia of every performance. When he learned we had season Met Opera tickets, he sensed kindred spirits and was eager to share more knowledge.

Did I know that she was born in Brooklyn in 1923 with the christened name of Cecilia Sophia Anna Maria Kalogeropoulos, and her father changed the Greek family name to Callas when he immigrated? No, I didn't. He continued: She was extremely overweight when she started out, you know (gesturing roundly), but after losing 80 pounds in 1950 she appeared in her American debut at the Chicago Lyric Opera, making a sensational entrance as a svelte Norma. A prima donna superstar had been born. Regal, elegant and fashionable, she was also highly temperamental (Albert savored the word as if describing himself). She was the scourge of opera house managers in Europe, and Rudolph Bing, director of the Metropolitan

Opera House in New York, had just (1958) fired her after the last of a number of sudden cancellations she'd made in the last season. Could you believe it? Fired Callas! (He pointed to a swag of black crepe over one window) It would be the end of her. (He wiped away a crocodile tear. Just kidding.) He also admitted he seldom attended opera himself. Hated the crowds, but loved the music.

Luckily for us, the bell rang and he jumped up excitedly to answer it, without turning down the volume on *Norma*. Nervous Nellie, I heard Arthur mutter as he pushed away the Siamese caressing his leg, and downed his drink. Albert returned with the next two arrivals, whom I'd known for some time, having found them their apartment on the first floor (the only one that took dogs). He made a grand gesture into the room – a Maria Callas gesture – to introduce Molly and Ruby. Finding we were already acquainted he stamped his foot in a snit and went into the kitchen to stir something on the stove.

The two women made over the cats and sat down on folding chairs brought in for the occasion. They were both short and masculine. Molly, the more butch, in clipped grey hair and woodchopper's attire, folded one leg up on the other and asked if she could smoke. "Not in front of the children," was the kitchen reply. Unfazed, she got up and turned the phonograph down, staring critically at Maria Callas. She fancied herself a photographer and always, as then, had a camera hanging from her neck.

Waif-like Ruby, the more retiring one, came over and we air kissed as we'd done on meeting ever since the two of us had been on the unfortunate Dutch liner *Ryndam* that foundered off Halifax, Nova Scotia in a raging storm two winters earlier on its way from Southampton, England, to New York. We had to lay low for a day until the weather improved. The ship was carrying mostly Dutch emigrants bound for work in the potato fields of Canada. They all got frightfully seasick, but refused to remain in their cabins as directed. They hung onto every device screwed down on the open decks just to be able to breathe fresh air, and were soaked and shivering in the December gale. Ruby and I were the only ones not ill and we hung out in the first class lounge. The steward behind the bar eventually succumbed to the ship's heaving and tossed me the keys to the liquor cabinets as he made his way below, calling back to help ourselves. We did just that, first trying out all the liqueurs we'd never tasted, then on to the strong stuff. We got very drunk.

The lounge chairs that were fitted with chains and hooks underneath to anchor them to the floor broke loose and were careening about to the rise and fall of the vessel along with overturned tables. We pretended we were on a dodge-em car ride at a carnival. The last thing I remembered clearly was seeing tiny Ruby sliding backwards in a chair holding aloft a glass of crème de menthe, and the window behind her smashing outward and her disappearing out onto the deck. I stood to try to follow her, but fell to the floor in a mess of splintered furniture. It seemed only moments later Ruby stumbled back through the open doorway, looking like a drenched monkey with a big stupid grin. Triumphant she held up the glass in her hand saying she hadn't spilled a drop. We laughed ourselves into a stupor, but later never reminisced about it. In fact, aside from my getting them their apartment, and an occasional street encounter, we had no further experiences to relate to at all.

Albert came in from the kitchen with more drinks and turned the volume back up. He had swirled a flowing scarf around his head and mimicked the gestures he thought Callas would make in the second act aria of *Norma* we were still enduring. From the album cover I'd deduced that Norma, a Druid high priestess, was telling Analgisa, a young temple virgin, to beat it after she discovered that Analgisa was screwing around with the Roman consul Norma had two kids by. At the sound of a loud gong Norma was summoned back down to her priestly duties and took the stairs with much anger, remorse and head thumping. Albert's swooping version looked more like Gloria Swanson doing her campy staircase descent in the 1950 *Sunset Boulevard*, but no matter. He had an audience now, and was making the most of it. It couldn't have been all that much fun prancing about for two cross-eyed Siamese.

He related more tidbits about the divine Callas as he swooped: She was the most famous singing actress of the post World War II era, and one of the greatest *bel canto* coloraturas of all time. (Swoop.) She suffered from myopia that nearly left her blind, but refused to wear glasses. (Swoop.) With that condition she had trouble following conductors, so they had to follow her. (Swoop.) She hated her mother so much she refused to admit she was from Brooklyn. Said it was Greece. The impromptu performance was abbreviated by the doorbell again. Albert swooped out to the kitchen to answer it.

A rollicking belly laugh was heard, followed by exaggerated kiss-

ing sounds screamed ‘dah-ling’s. We had no idea what to expect.

Albert returned to the living room entrance holding the fingers aloft of a beefy arm that was attached to one of the largest women I had ever encountered. She was huge all over, including height. Dressed all in black, as she was, didn’t minimize her girth. She squeezed gracefully through to the living room with Albert leading the way, and settled into the wing-back he had earlier vacated. This was Lucrezia, he said, emphasizing it be pronounced Lu-CRAY-tsia. He held up the package of home--made pasta her Italian mother made. She beamed a beautiful toothsome smile and nodded nobly to each as we were introduced. Like most big women, her face above the neck was lovely and flawless. Her abundant black tresses were raked back into a large figure 8. Bold earrings dangled from her ears and an Art Deco brooch anchored her V-neckline. She knew how to hold herself, so it was no surprise to find she was an actress. When she spoke and laughed with deep resonance, Arthur said he wondered at first if she might be a man in drag. She did have a suggestion of a mustache, not uncommon in Mediterranean women, but he concluded that if she were a he, trying to be a she, the mustache would have been shaved off.

Her appearance certainly sparked things up. Even dour Molly cracked an occasional smirk. Albert asked her to tell us about some of her favorite roles. She said being on *The Ernie Kovacs Show* was by far the most rewarding of all. I was thrilled. Arthur and I had been fans of Ernie Kovacs since his first show on CBS in 1952-1953 and again on NBC in 1955-56. His quirky humor didn’t have wide audience appeal, but it certainly resonated with critics and those of us who appreciated innovative and offbeat TV comedy. Best remembered was the Nairobi Trio, three musicians in ape masks and derbies who played like jerky automatons. At the end of each phrase, the drummer stood and bashed one of the others’ heads with his sticks, then sat down. After a pause they’d resume as before to the end of the next phrase, followed by another head bashing, then another pause and so on until the end of the piece.

Among the many other zany comedy characters I would never forget was Kovacs own portrayal of Percy Dovetonsil, a lisping poet who read nonsense verses through coke-bottle-bottom spectacles amid heaving sighs, rolling eyes and long pauses. His sense of timing was perfect. Even his signature prop – a big cigar –

– figured prominently in the series of unusual commercials he did for the Dutch Masters cigar company. His second wife, the singer and actress Edie Adams, added her own absurdist touch and sex appeal to the show. But her poignantly simple rendition of the Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos' classic piece for voice and 8 cellos: *Bachiana Brasileiras No.5*, was an unforgettable high point for me.

We urged Lu-CRAY-tsia to relate some of her experiences on the show. She was one of the regular cast of actors, but because of her immensity they saved her for special solo bits. By far her funniest recollection was a skit parodying a Betty Furness commercial for Westinghouse refrigerators. Furness at the time was a big name in television. She had acted in small roles in Hollywood, but wasn't a great success until she got her own television talk show in the early 1950s. She was the essence of the ultimate successful business woman: forty-ish, slim, impeccably stylish, with a self-assured and no-nonsense delivery. Westinghouse was an early sponsor, and after her own programs ended, she continued to be the TV personification of company class until 1960, peddling everything it manufactured.

But Furness was probably best remembered for her refrigerator ads, and especially one that she didn't actually appear in. She was out sick on the day the ad was to air (everything was live then, including advertisements), so another actress of similar height and smart hairdo was hired to fill in. During the commercial she was supposed to open the refrigerator door to show its spacious interior storage, but no matter how hard she tried, the door wouldn't budge. She pulled and pulled, frantically ad-libbing lines to cover it up. What the viewing audience didn't see was a stagehand on his knees behind the appliance trying desperately to enter it from the back and unlock the stubborn handle. All that viewers saw was a bobbing fridge and a harried actress wringing her hands out front without a clue. The entire country chuckled at the gaff and it became legend, eventually being attributed to Furness. It didn't hurt her image at all. For years afterwards, she was the Director of Consumer Affairs for New York City, *soignée* to the end. She was equally remembered for the famous last line of her early commercials that became a show-biz classic: Closing a refrigerator door, "You can be sure if it's Westinghouse."

The parody of it on Kovacs' show was in what was becoming

known as a ‘blackout’, an innovative new format not created by Kovacs, but used often and perfected by him: a short comedy skit, usually out of context, ending in a quick punch line and then a brief blackened screen. It had the giantess Lucrezia costumed in a frumpy flowered housedress and apron, wrinkled stockings and faded felt slippers, with her hair half up in rollers. She hovered over a child-size antique oak cabinet with a door on the front and brass fixtures. On top was a block of real ice set in a metal pan to catch melting drips. On cue she bent over as if about to close the door with one hand and gestured with the other to emphasize what she was saying to the camera in her best Italian accent, “You can-ah be shoor eef eets-ah ice-ah box.” Blackout.

It was a funny moment in a less than hilarious visit. Albert thought he smelled something burning in the kitchen and went to investigate. It was nothing, only a little spill-over from the main dish that he kept secret, but it indicated that dinner was ready. He enlisted the aid of Molly and Ruby, the ones nearest the doorway, to help him set up the table. It turned out to be no simple task. Because there was no proper dining facility in the apartment, he had had a carpenter friend make a fold-up design that could be brought into the living room and unfolded from the center outward. The problem was, the thing was so large and the room so small that guests had to be already seated and the table opened directly onto their laps.

Arthur and I were on the sofa, with one cat still at his pant leg, and the other on my crotch. I disliked cats generally, and they sensed it and always made for my lap first. I never knew how to shoo them off gracefully. Lucrezia was opposite in the wing-back, Molly and Ruby in folding chairs beside her. Albert directed the unfolding of the table and drew up another overstuffed chair from his bedroom for himself that filled the doorway. The other end of the table was smack up against Norma and her Druid virgins. With only arms free above the table, all together we straightened the cloth he tossed on it and passed the silverware and plates around. He started a tray of wine and glasses from his end, then disappeared back into the kitchen. Vamping ‘til ready, Lucrezia asked what Arthur and I did. I said I was an artist, at the moment making satirical figures of wood, metal and paint. Genial, tow-headed Arthur flashed his gap-toothed smile and modestly indicated he was a project manager for the New York City Housing Authority. She asked

She asked which project, and, whaddaya know, her mother lived in that very one. Small world.

Albert, from the kitchen, reached over the back of his chair with a tureen for someone to set down. The surprise was *bouilla-baisse*, a fish-crustacean-whatever stew – the surprise not being the stew but that he had never attempted anything that complicated before. In fact he admitted he was an indifferent cook, and mostly ate take-out. Gingerly we dipped in and found it quite palatable. Tasty as in Marseille, Albert. He made a sweeping Musketeer flourish. The cats went crazy over the smell of fish. With a loud clap of his hands they were banished to the top of the sofa-back behind Arthur and me, hissing retaliation. I rubbed my crotch in relief. Norma was still at it, threatening revengeful murder of her kids in Act 3.

The *piece de resistance* was yet to come, and it was the real surprise: a gorgeous big lemon meringue pie with meringue eight inches high like those behind plate glass in roadside diners. It was another first time for Albert. He had decided not to follow the recipe that called for ReaLemon, a commercially bottled product, and squeezed what he thought was the equivalent in real lemons, saying nothing was too good for his guests. He placed it down on the table and picked up a pie knife, arching it high for added effect. He deftly cut through the meringue to the bottom of the crust. The knife came out dripping bright yellow. Another try brought the same result. It hadn't gelled. Suddenly purple with rage, he shouted an expletive and threw the knife at the pie plate, then leaped like a madman over the arm of the chair blocking the kitchen and stomped out of the apartment, slamming the door. He didn't return.

At least not while we were still there. Clotted meringue and sticky lemon got splattered everywhere – walls, ceiling, table, chairs, Callas' photo. Stunned and unable yet to free ourselves, we sat dumbly mopping gunk off our cheeks, eyebrows, hair, and Lucrezia off her ample bosom. One Siamese got it in the eye, the other had a cauliflower ear, and they hissed and spat nonstop. Finally, the table items were gathered in the soggy tablecloth and slid across to Albert's chair in a heap. The table was then folded small again and we could stand. But we were too upset to linger any longer. A splash on faces and hands at the sink and we were out of there. As I closed the door, Norma and her man, condemned to burn in Act 4, bellowed their final duet on the funeral pyre. We had another diva in mind who should have been so lucky.



THE GIFT

In 1978, while summering on Nantucket Island, a most unusual phone request was received from the secretary of an investment consulting firm in Manhattan that also handled the business end of a performing arts foundation involving me (she acted as secretary for both):

"One of our biggest clients is Carroll Rosenbloom, the owner of the Los Angeles Rams. You know, the football team?" she began. "Well, he's here on business with my boss. While he was waiting to see him just now, we were shooting the breeze in the outer office, and during the conversation he asked if by any chance I knew someone on the island of Martha's Vineyard off Cape Cod who could do him a tremendous favor. Like deliver something to somebody. I said I didn't. But then after he went in I thought of you on Nantucket. Your islands are close to each other, aren't they?"

"We-e-ell not exactly. Most people assume there is this bridge between them. But actually our island is over twenty miles further out to sea and you can only get from here to there by ferry or puddle jumper."

"Puddle jumper?"

"Small plane"

"Oh. Well, would you consider it? He's in with the boss right now and I'd like to tell him when he comes out that I found somebody. You'd be doing us a favor too, really. He's a big client."

"What is this *thing* he wants delivered?"

"I don't know. Just a present for somebody, I think. I'll ask him before he leaves, if you say you'll do it. Please? It can't be anything *that impossible*."

"Well, okay. Sure"

She promised to send details in a week or so, and that allowed time for a quick background check on the guy.

Carroll Rosenbloom, it appeared, was a bigger-than-life character: big client, big athlete, big spender, big celebrity, big gambler, and above all, big man in professional football in the nineteen-sixties and seventies. Back in his hometown he'd owned the major chunk of the Baltimore Colts and (with a little help from Johnny Unitas) led them to the NFL Championship in 1958, winning a classic battle with the New York Giants, 23-17, a game that sports pundits remember as "the greatest game ever played". They went on to fifteen consecutive winning seasons, including a Super Bowl victory in 1971. He was also influential as a policy leader on the NFL Executive Committee when it came to the merger agreement with the former American Football League.

Despite being a big public figure, Rosenbloom, born in 1907, privately remained something of a mystery all his life. He was a generous millionaire, (he awarded each of his players a \$500 bonus after their first winning season, for example), but no one knew for sure where his wealth came from. Was it a family business selling khaki uniforms to the army during World War II, begun by his immigrant father? Or, as some hinted darkly, a hidden Mafia connection in his gambling sprees? All they knew was what they saw: a tall handsome outgoing figure, impeccably dressed and politely soft-spoken, who spent lavishly and had an all-abiding obsession with professional football.

In July 1972, in a historically unprecedented deal, he swapped his Colts for Robert Irsay's Rams and moved to Los Angeles. Over the next six years the Los Angeles Rams would win the NFC Western Division every year and play in four NFC Championship games. The unique design of the curved ram's horn on their helmets and coach jackets was attributed to him.

With him went his wife Georgia, whom he married in 1966, and children by a previous marriage. Georgia Irwin, originally from St. Louis, was considered by many the quintessential blond gold-digger of all time who appeared to revel in that reputation, especially in her new Hollywood venue. A former Las Vegas showgirl, dancer and sometime nightclub singer, she was said to have been introduced to Rosenbloom by her old pal, the elder Joe Kennedy. He became the sixth of her seven husbands. Acquaintances could

why this savvy guy could get mixed up with such a “bimbo”, but he doted on her and even built her a grand mansion. They eventually had two children.

One of Carroll’s best friends from east coast days was Edward Bennett Williams, a criminal trial lawyer, who was also part owner of the Washington Redskins. Bennett was recuperating from another of what his cronies remembered as a seeming endless series of stomach and colon cancer operations endured over the years. He and his wife were spending the summer at their vacation home in Edgartown on the Vineyard. What Rosenthal wanted was, literally, the grandest, most expensive get-well surprise present imaginable, delivered personally to the Williams’ front door. He scrawled what he had in mind on a Rams memo pad for our secretary to pass on, but then held up the project for weeks, making numerous changes from L.A. Waiting out his final decisions offered an opportunity to learn something about his buddy as well.

Edward Bennett Williams (he was always referred to by all three names) was born in Hartford, Connecticut on May 31, 1920. Studying law at Georgetown University, his reputation as a radical lawyer was made in the early fifties when he began representing several liberals, socialists and communists before the House Un-American Activities Committee, including Carl Foreman, Robert Rossen and Harold Hecht. Conversely, he would then represent Joseph McCarthy during the Senate censure proceedings against him. Williams claimed from the start that he would defend almost anyone as long as the client gave him total control of the case and paid up front. He represented Mafiosi and pornographers for outrageous fees. He also defended priests, judges and “attractive women in distress” for little or nothing. But his most (in)famous client was the mobster boss Frank Costello who hired him in 1956 to help overturn a conviction of tax evasion. Williams got him released from prison, earning the lifelong epithet “gangster lawyer”, even though he was to take on a variety of other less publicized or scandalous cases in his long career.

What he would not take on were clients with causes: he said it was a mistake to mix ideology with law and distrusted political activists who refused to give him full control in the courtroom. He famously refused to defend Dr. Benjamin Spock and other antiwar activists indicted for inciting students to burn draft cards in 1970.

A big man, like Carroll Rosenbloom, Williams had a pugnacious look and confrontational style totally unlike Rosenbloom's, yet even with a thirteen year age difference they remained fast friends for many years. A mutual love of professional sports bonded that closeness. Besides being president of the Washington Redskins, he also owned the Baltimore Orioles baseball team. Whereas his colleague was reticent about revealing anything about himself, Williams was a tell-all extrovert, always front and center, who bragged he could – and did - hold a jury enthralled for more than three hours with his ringing oratory.

Rosenbloom eventually got his act together and submitted a wish list: one handsome woven basket with maroon and gold ribbons (Redskins colors) festooning the handles; one bottle of Louis Roederer Cristal Brut Champagne from France (preferably chilled); two crystal Steuben flutes; one pound of fresh Iranian beluga caviar; two mother-of-pearl spoons; two limes (yes!); one package of toast points or similar; one bouquet of blue and yellow flowers (Rams colors) in an appropriate receptacle; and one gilt-edged card handwritten and submitted by Rosenbloom to be attached to a handle. In a separate note he indicated that absolutely no expense was to be spared, and receipts forwarded to the secretary for immediate reimbursement. Impressive as it was at first glance it didn't seem like the impossible project it nearly became.

First, a noted local craftsman had to agree to begin making a typical – if outsized - traditional Nantucket Lightship Basket. That meant a solid month of fashioning the round wood base, carving tall half-hoop handles and ivory pin mounts, shaping staves and securing them precisely into the base, then painstakingly weaving alternate rows of soaked reeds among them from the base outward in tight symmetry. It had to be sturdy but perfectly balanced.

Nantucket was a small island with limited resources. Gold ribbon for festooning was plentiful enough in the local dry goods store, but none in maroon. A colleague who commuted by ferry to the mainland looked all over Hyannis on Cape Cod without success. Eventually a few dark brown velvet strands turned up in someone's attic that, when ironed out and wiped with a glaze of thinned alizarin crimson paint appeared vaguely maroonish in the right light.

The Roederer Champagne was more of a problem. The two liquor stores in town didn't carry anything more expensive than

Dom Perignon, and not much variety of that. It had to be put on special order and delivery couldn't be expected for at least two weeks. So ordered it was. As were the Steuben glasses and spoons through a midtown china and glassware boutique - one month delivery. Rosenbloom had not indicated any specific deadline, so it seemed logical to have the contents ready when the basket was.

A florist was notified to stock blue and yellow blossoms in anticipation, and the assorted toast points and limes were a cinch. But the stickler was the fresh Iranian caviar. Nothing remotely like what he wanted was available on island. A call to our mutual secretary in New York, who then called Rosenbloom's office in L.A., revealed that he had already solved that problem himself. Through connections in the Shah's royal court he quite regularly had fresh caviar flown to him in southern California by private jet. In this case he simply had to be notified a week before the grand present was ready to go and he would arrange to have a plane fly the caviar (packed in dry ice) directly from Tehran to Nantucket Airport. The only stipulation was that the minute the Iranian plane landed, no matter what time of day or night, The Basket and caviar were to be immediately placed on a revved up local chartered plane and whisked off to Edgartown on the Vineyard, thence by taxi to the Williams' seaside compound.

After months of preparation all elements were assembled and arranged on the day of departure. The result beggared description. The Basket gleamed in understated tawny splendor; the assorted items, *sans* caviar, were cunningly anchored in silky tissue; the virescent wine bottle rose above the blue and yellow floral arrangement, that in turn spilled gracefully over the basket rim on one side, balancing the gold and (ahem) maroon bows and streamers billowing from the opposite hoop handle. The gilt get-well message was conspicuously affixed to the near handle (allowing the viewer a possible moment's reflection on the appropriateness of all this gustatory ostentation for a patient recovering from serious intestinal surgery). Finished, it was a work of art that looked like a million and cost thousands.

Carroll Rosenbloom was notified and the following Saturday was set as the date. The Basket was driven out early to the airport. No definite hour could be promised, given the weather conditions and the furtiveness of the aircraft's maneuvers. But day turned to night and there was no sign of the plane. A phone number was left

at the dispatcher's station and The Basket was placed back in the car and returned home. A call to the pilot of the charter flight brought up a recorded message indicating he scheduled flights only for daylight hours, the next being Sunday morning at eight a.m.

No sooner had The Basket arrived home than the airport dispatcher phoned to say a package about a foot square with funny looking scrawls had just been delivered under rather strange circumstances. The plane had landed and kept its engine running and taken off immediately after dropping it off. So it was out to the airport again, this time to pick up the package and make room for it back in the fridge. (Rosenbloom's admonition to deliver it as soon as it was at hand was now impossible.) The Basket was very gently placed in a huge black trash bag – the only thing that could contain it – and left in the back of the car overnight for a fast morning start-up.

Sunday mornings in summer were busy times in our wharf gallery, and it was simply impossible to personally close shop even for the few hours it would take to bring the mission to a close. So my partner Arthur was recruited to go instead. The charter pilot agreed to fly him to Martha's Vineyard right away. So Arthur quickly changed from shorts into slacks and a fresh shirt, and he, the package from the fridge and the precious black bundle were driven out to the side of the airport where private aircraft parked. The pilot was waiting by the plane. The sealed package was opened and the caviar tin lifted out of the dry ice and nestled next to the limes. Then the two of them slid the bag behind the cockpit and in short order were up and away.

Edgartown airport was not the liveliest spot when they touched down about nine a.m. They had to wait for a taxi to be called, and when it arrived, the driver – a summer rent-a-cop doing a little weekend moonlighting – didn't have a clue where the Williams' street was. The clerk at a car rental counter in the terminal produced a local map and together they thought they'd found it – a tiny dead end lane that stopped at the beach. The clerk checked a phone book for verification, but, of course, found the Williams unlisted.

After a half hour of driving round and round, the driver spotted the street sign up ahead. Unfortunately, when they approached, it turned out to be one way away from the beach, meaning it was a private lane: do not enter. The driver parked at the corner while Arthur slid the plastic off The Basket and primped the contents.

Stepping out into the shimmering heat, he lugged it a ways, then (the caviar making it heavier) had to set it down several times on the sidewalk to rest and look for the right house number. It turned out to be the last one toward the ocean.

He stopped on the porch to wipe perspiration from his brow, and pressed the buzzer. It sounded very distant. No answer. He rapped on the closed door and after long minutes it opened just a crack. He couldn't see who was behind it in the dark, but he held up The Basket and said,

"I have a present for you from a friend. (Rosenbloom had made it clear this was to be a complete surprise. No previous phone calls.)

A muscled arm reached out, grabbed both handles and yanked The Basket inside without a word, slamming the door. Arthur froze for a moment, then walked his aching limbs back to the cab.

"The son of a bitch didn't even say thank you. I didn't even see his face!" he told the driver, more in wonder than anger.

"Look behind ya," the driver pointed.

The figures of a man and a woman were seen scurrying down off the porch and toward the beach.

"Beats me why," said Arthur, just glad the ordeal was over.

Staring blankly out the side window on the drive to the airport, he suddenly remembered that Williams had recently defended several more of his unsavory characters in D.C. and made front pages everywhere.

'Maybe they figured there was a bomb in there' he mused. The thought cushioned the flight home.

Several weeks passed before Rosenbloom got in touch with our mutual secretary and asked what he could do to reciprocate. The Los Angeles Rams helmet that he purportedly designed, had long been a favorite personal icon. So having a real one - beat up outside and sweaty inside with a player's name tag - would be tantamount to owning a work of art. Our secretary passed the wish along and within a fortnight a box arrived from Los Angeles containing just the right one. It was placed prominently on a pedestal as a piece of sculpture.

A while later UPS delivered another, larger, package that held a new regulation Rams line coach parka in blue, with a hood and fleece lining. The signature yellow ram horns formed epaulets on

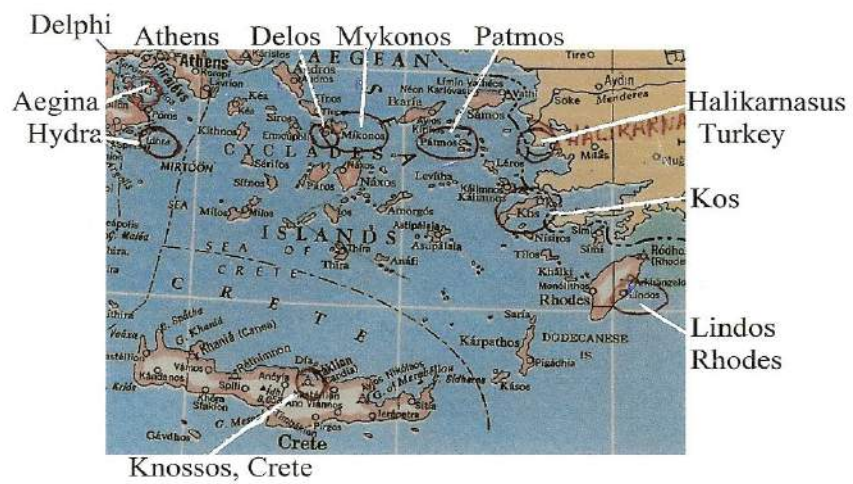
the shoulders that curved down under the arm pits and up the back. In a pocket was a plastic entry card with my name embossed beneath the logo. The enfolding handwritten note indicated it would allow free access to the owner's private box for any home games in L.A. or to any local stadium boxes when the team played on the road. It was signed simply:

Thank You for Everything, Carroll.

The parka went to a young relative, but a sudden tragic event rendered the card useless. The following spring Rosenbloom, an expert swimmer, drowned in the ocean behind his Florida beach house under much-debated circumstances and conjecture: Was it an accident as the coroner's report indicated? Was it suicide after a recent cancer find, as our secretary believed? Or something more sinister? In a televised episode on *PBS Frontline* four years later his death was cited as an example of the seamier side of pro football. In taped interviews mobsters swore they held his legs down to drown him and showed pictures of the alleged result. There were even rumors that Georgia was involved. (It didn't help that on the day of his funeral she moved a new lover into her mansion and made him No.7.) But no inquiries followed. The original coroner's "accidental" decision prevailed. Carroll Rosenbloom would remain as much a mystery in death as in life.

One thing was certain however: the guy had a gift for giving. The Rams helmet on its stand became a popular conversation piece, repeatedly evoking that summer of wild, vicarious indulgence that, in retrospect, was a gift in itself.

New York City, November 2008



THE GREEKS HAD(n't) A WORD FOR IT

The ferry pulled into its dock at the Fire Island Pines inlet one Saturday morning in the spring of 1969. It disgorged the ragtag bunch of beach house owners carrying all the usual stuff required for summer living in that spot on the thin strip of land off the southern shore of Long Island, N.Y. that had no roads and no access to other communities along Fire Island except treading weathered boardwalks over poison ivy undergrowth. Almost everything, including furniture, food and booze, had to be brought over on those time-worn vessels and the early birds were there to beat the crowds that were bound to increase as the weather warmed up.

We—Arthur, Billy, Roger, Ralph and I—were there to help our other best friends, Carl and Henry, open their bayside house. We'd done it for years, making an early holiday romp of the weekend. But that morning Ralph spotted a poster up on the town bulletin as we followed the others off the ramps. It announced in hand lettering "SUMMER 69: Cruise the Greek Isles This Fall" Discussing it on the trek along the boardwalk to the cottage, we five agreed that might be something we'd like to do. The double meaning of the signage was not lost on us, and we were somewhat leery of joining some kind of Screaming Mimi, over-the-top caper where we'd feel out of place. We were all Boys in the Band, so to speak, but conservative types who enjoyed our own quiet drinking and dining together—and private jokes. None of us were habitual barflies on the club circuit or in any way "overt", except for occasional camp-

camping over cocktails among ourselves. We decided to call the number on the poster. Roger did the honors and found that it was a 2-week deal leaving just after Labor Day, air fare and cruise ship included as well as land accommodations and some meals. Side trips were on our own. By the end of the weekend we'd all signed up.

Arthur, Billy, Ralph and I had been Greenwich Village neighbors for many years, enough to know what to expect of one another. Ralph was a sober-sided, pipe-smoking introvert who had a day job in an office somewhere uptown. He enjoyed being in our group but not always of it. His hobby was repairing old books, and had at one time skillfully rebound an antique leather edition of Shakespeare I'd inherited from a great grandfather. Billy was the youngest of the group and still something of an alley cat on his own. With boyish good looks, he was even-tempered, a bit flighty, and willing to try anything once. He worked in accounting for various tony fashion houses in midtown Manhattan, notably Leslie Fay. He grew pot on his fire escape until it was discovered and removed. The only time I ever tried the stuff was in his third floor Bleecker Street apartment after he harvested the first batch. It was so awful that I had a permanent sore throat from it and never toked again, even if we did giggle like school girls on that particular high. He was also a knowledgeable jack of all trades. Several years after this trip he drove up and ferried over to Nantucket Island to successfully install the entire electrical system in the new art studio I was having built. The result was very professional.

Arthur had been my long time apartment mate all over the Village. We moved from Barrow Street to Downing Street to Waverly Place, where we were at the time. He was the eldest of the lot but, with a shock of blond hair and gap-tooth smile, he had such an "aw shucks" child-like quality about him that every day was a revelation he couldn't wait to share. In many ways he was truly the youngest of us. He had been the beleaguered manager of a huge New York City Housing Project for years and grew to hate it so much he took early retirement a few years after this episode. Obiging but firm in his core beliefs, he was quietly religious, though never proselytizing. His only drawback, also endearing, was his absent-mindedness. It was legendary and all of his acquaintances had oft-told tales about it. Example: at a cocktail party the discouraging hostess happened to look down at his out-stretched legs and

stopped in mid-sentence, “Arthur, how come you’re wearing one laced shoe and one loafer?” He had no idea, but posited that maybe the phone had rung while he was in the process of changing one of them in the dark, and had simply forgot about the other.

Roger was the class clown, full of self-deprecating humor. He was forever screwing up and then making us laugh at his stupidity. Five-foot-eight, nearsighted and fringe bald since puberty, he sort of knew he didn’t have a chance at much success in his milieu. He lived in New Jersey, near enough to take in most of our get-togethers, and sold real estate when he could (one month he was dining Cordon Bleu and the next macaroni and cheese). But when he decided to go with a hair piece, his whole demeanor changed. He began taking himself much more seriously and really felt he was finally up there with the rest of the lookers. Every year the “rug” (his term) got larger and fuller until, by the time of the cruise, the latest, a reddish blond, fell well over his forehead and swept the sides of his ears. He took to conspicuously tossing it back out of his eyes, where contact lenses replaced the coke-bottle-bottom headlights of yore. He even persuaded me to order a diminutive one to fill in my miniscule (but expanding) bald spot, and accompanied me to the fitting. I referred to mine as a peruke.

Jack was a pal of Roger’s and lived near him in New Jersey. None of the rest of us had ever met him, but he eventually fitted comfortably into our groove. Tall, dark and impressive, he was used to culling favors from others and soon had the rest of us running errands that we wouldn’t dream of before. He showed up at the airport in a crisp custom made long-sleeved shirt, opened to the third button to reveal gleaming gold neck chains. On his wrist clanked a bulky gold ID bracelet, and on one little finger a gold and onyx signet ring. The rest of us, in chinos and polos, felt decidedly dowdy in his wake. We could never remember if he designed jewelry or men’s fashions, but assumed it must be something like that. No matter. He was charming and funny, with a wicked wit and rapier tongue. He was also very persuasive working his wiles at the front desks of hotels.

I was 40 at the time, probably about the age of the others except Arthur and Billy. Not only had I been an artist forever, but, for the last four years, also the director of a performing arts foundation with enough contacts in the acting community to have a special Interest in experiencing the various sites where all those ancient

rites took place that eventually evolved into what we came to know as Theater.

That, then, was the six-pack that climbed aboard an Olympic Airlines night flight at JFK bound to arrive in Athens next morning. The estimate was 10 hours. Our seats were together in two rows (for protection, we laughed – against what we weren't sure). As we surveyed the territory there seemed to be more youngish male heads than any other, but so far none appeared in any way exceptional or loud. And there were enough retired blue-heads and women with kids to keep it from seeming a theme park. I was on the aisle of the back row of us and soon became engrossed in the literature I'd taken along about the places we were visiting, hoping to pass the long hours (never able to sleep on planes) memorizing highlights. Next to me in the middle seat Arthur's head began dropping regularly into his newspaper and Ralph, on the inside, seemed to be mesmerized by the same book page in his lap. The heads of our gang in front were already slipping out of sight. The sky through the window never looked blacker. It seemed we had settled in for the night.

But about two hours later, after the stewardesses (they didn't become "flight staff" until the '80s) had made considerable passes along the aisles with drink orders, a low volcanic rumbling began up ahead that slowly bubbled up into raucous male snorts and shouts of "Get you, Mae" and "Coffee, tea or me?" Six or eight of the, until then, perfectly behaved young men took it upon themselves, after several rounds of booze, to relieve the besotted ladies of their duties. Sporting some ratty wigs from god-knew-where and, with rolled up pant legs and borrowed aprons tied around their waists, they sashayed up and down the aisles with trays full of drinks and nibblies, singing "Nuts. Nuts. Red hot nuts. Get 'em from your peanut man." Suddenly party time. The real stewardesses retired to the back of the plane, hugging themselves and choking with laughter. Whenever a "waiter-ess" needed change he would race back to them and curtsy his "thank you's". Probably more liquor got sold that night than on any run they could remember. This was what boys had come all the way from Duluth for.

It, of course, altered the dynamics considerably. We of the more conservative ilk were definitely in the minority. It was clear we weren't where we wanted to be. The rest of the flight was one big

with even a few blue heads joining in. Sleep was out of the question for my pals and the commotion disturbed my reading. But luckily I always traveled with ear plugs. I put them to good use and continued my studies.

Greece, I found, was a nation of small towns, many situated in isolated mountain locales with as few as a hundred or so inhabitants. Numbing poverty and ignorance prevailed. Since the days of the Ottomans, local churches that served as community centers for local politics as well as places of worship, and tavernas where the men sipped *ouzo* or *tskoudhia* after the days' labors cemented the rustic code of ethics based on honor and faith and family pride that still remained a constant in 1969. There were no bar girls to be found in villages, for example. Women, who also worked in the fields, would not be found at the cafes, or smoking in public, or even riding bicycles. They remained at home, except on Sundays when everyone took their evening walks together – up and down the streets or squares “until they got tired,” one elder later told me. “If a girl goes out with a boy alone, it is as if they have slept together. If they recognize each other during the Sunday evening strolls and want to get married, their parents have to arrange it,”

It was from that background that the despised Regime of the Colonels revolution took place in 1967. It was an army officers' uprising. They had all come from similar backwater peasant villages, including the eventual leader Premiere George Papadopoulos, who resented and hated city life and its inhabitants and wanted the country to return to its roots. They were ruthless in torturing, killing, or exiling to remote islands as “communists”, all those who opposed them. Many Athenians escaped to Europe. King Constantine II was forced to flee with all his family to Italy and remained permanently abroad (but kept a home near Athens to which he returned often after the Regime was suppressed and Greece became a democratic state in 1974). Papadopoulos added more stringent rules, some silly: no long hair on boys; no smashing of crockery in time with the frenzied music of bouzouki tavernas; no mini skirts on girls; all government officials must attend church every Sunday, and so on. One of Athens' outdoor café regulars dismissed the situation with a wave of his ouzo, “In the sun washed countryside his austerities might be better received, but here he has created a state of enforced torpor. We do our best to ignore it.”

What Papadopoulos did allow – and crave – was tourists, lots of

them, and he tried to cover up all evidence of evil doing behind the building of luxury hotels and tourist amenities, even in small towns and islands, as we would witness soon in Mykonos. He and his colonels were so successful at hiding the sordid underbelly of his regime that, if I hadn't learned of it during the flight, we would never have been the wiser as we traveled around the country.

Engrossed in learning the preceding revelations, I was hardly aware that the plane party had peaked and the revelers were sinking back into their seats in varying degrees of sobriety. A sodden stupor hung over the cabin as the real stewardesses straightened up the mess. My buddies were awake and not happy, foreseeing more of the same shenanigans on the cruise. From the seat in front of me, Roger, always the cockeyed optimist, said over his shoulder that at least it would be quiet for a day or so on board while they all dried out.

Our plane set down at Athens' Ellinikon International Airport about mid-morning the next day. It took a while for the tour directors to sort out the "men from the boys" (Billy's remark) and herd the eighty or so members of our contingency onto waiting buses bound for Piraeus, the port of Athens. Anticipation was high about how the ship would look, and although it appeared a tad smaller than any of us expected, it was in fine shape with its gleaming white upper portion and soft-grey hulk.

Four large red and black life boats hung over each side like accents. It was named MV ORPHEUS, for the mythical poet and musician, born of the muse Calliope and Apollo, god of music, who presented him with a lyre. His music enchanted not only the wild beasts but the trees and rocks upon Olympus so that they moved from their places to follow the sounds of his golden harp. He married a nymph named Eurydice. When she died soon after from a snake bite he followed her into Hades, where his music also charmed even the most inexorable deity, Hades, who allowed him to take her back on one condition — that he not look back until he reached the upperworld. But as soon as he saw the light of day he did just that and she vanished. In despair he roamed about the wilds playing again for the rocks, trees and rivers. A fierce band of Thracian women came upon the gentle musician and killed and dismembered him in one of their Bacchanalian orgies. When they tossed his severed head into the river Hebrus, it continued to call for Eurydice. Finally it landed on shore on the island Lesbos,

where the muses buried it. After Orpheus's death the lyre was sent to the heavens and became the constellation Lyra.

After a tour around the top deck, Jack approved of the ship. "Smart looking, very smart," he pronounced, rattling his ID. The cabins, again, looked very smart also. We were paired off two (Jack and Roger) by two (Billy and Ralph) into cabins on several decks. The one Arthur and I shared was on a deck lower than the others, but on a level with the main dining room. Boarding must have been very swift, because in no time the anchor was hoisted and off we sailed on our Aegean islands fantasy. The first stop was to be Mykonos, and the deck was cluttered with passengers filtering in the sea air as we approached. The island was famous for its many windmills, a moribund number of which defined the crest of the highest hills in the distance. There were others at water's edge that were still in use – white cylinders with pointed roofs of various cut branches and stouter irregular branches as red-painted staves for the triangular white sails that gyrated recklessly like giant pinwheels. That area of the Cyclades was renowned for its gusty winds that made possible the main livelihood, grinding agricultural products for export.

As the Orpheus eased into the harbor, it was surrounded by anchored little blue, red and green fishing skiffs that bobbed their welcome all down the coast. Up on the deck it was clear from the frenzy of new building everywhere that Premiere Papadopoulos had chosen that island for heavy tourist development. (In fact, checking years later about the island's growth, it was learned that all the inns and small hotels currently operating claimed to be "in business since 1969", and visitor data on incipient numbers of international jet setters, gays, movie stars, royalty, etc. flocking there as a popular holiday destination rose sharply starting that year. One contingency Papadopoulos didn't bother was the bands of hippies still allowed to live in caves in the hillsides. If anything he seemed to encourage their colorful "gypsy" lifestyle as another tourist attraction. One later observer claimed the island had become an "all night frat party that never stops.")

But in the fall of 1969 Mykonos was still a sleepy sliver of a distant past: widows in black lugged pails of water up snowy steps; a donkey neighed its discontent; fishermen mended ancient nets on strand; brilliant, sundrenched arches framed children playing silently in the shadows. There was even a pet pelican that strutted its

authority throughout the maze of tiny paths between the white-washed walls of the town and past the stunning Church of Our Lady of Paraportiani, that comprised five churches joined together and was considered the finest traditional architecture of the Cyclades. It also made regular stops at the few tavernas along the way for sardine tidbits. (I was to understand later that the pelican had become such a treasured fixture that it – or a successor – was always on hand for “fotos and feeding”). The outer beaches were what became the biggest future draw for winter weary travelers, the nicest aptly named Paradise, where in some areas, it was winked, nudity was the *mode du jour*.

The next morning many of the ship’s passengers, now recovered from the flight but definitely more subdued, made for Paradise Beach. Billy, Jack and Roger chose to join them, while Ralph, Arthur and I opted to visit the tiny nearby island of Delos. It was a half-hour trip by launch, somewhat hazardous due to cross currents, but well worth the trouble. It was the tiny center of the Cyclades archipelago, but historically the most important. Barren, treeless and devoid of human inhabitants, in ancient times it was a sacred site second only to the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. In Greek legend it was the birthplace of the twins Artemis and Apollo, by Zeus and Leto. Zeus’s wife Hera banished Leto, daughter of Titans, from the earth, but the sea god Poseidon took pity on her and provided Delos as a place for her to rest and give birth. Immediately, four great pillars arose from the sea to stabilize the island for her safety.

We found Delos as windswept and forbidding as Mykonos was welcoming. Since antiquity no one could be born or buried there (burials were on Rhenia, a neighboring island separated by a narrow channel) and the only sign of humans besides ourselves at the moment was a transient group of 14 French archeologists who maintained the museum and workshop. They – and we – had to be ready to leave on the last boat for Mykonos at 3 pm. So we scrambled around the scattered chunks of marble with our guidebooks. The island itself was a museum, covered with ruins of temples and sanctuaries dedicated to various gods, including Egyptian. Certainly the most spectacular feature was the sight of two gigantic erect phalluses on either side of a platform in the Stoivadeion temple, once containing a statue of Dionysus framed by two character actors. Since the phallus was Dionysus’ symbol, an entire avenue

lined by smaller marble ones on pedestals lead downhill to the sea, softened here and there by clumps of bright wildflowers and, at the moment, two foraging peacocks.

Tearing ourselves away from the obvious, we crossed over several segments of tiled floors left open to the elements, but brilliant as they were new about four hundred B.C. The most stunning and complete was that of the now famous Dionysus Riding a Panther in the House of Masks, its details so fine that the eye of the panther alone contained 100 stones. Beyond the House of Masks, an early performers' green room, was the circular outdoor theater where 5,000 onlookers could watch ritual orgies. Arthur was caught on film seated intently on one of the curved marble bleachers as if trying to conjure up mental images of what some of those past orgiastic pleasures might have been, with little success. His hair was blowing eastward along with the few spindly trees in the background, and though the sun was fully overhead, he was hugging himself in a zipped up jacket against the fierce wind. He swore at one point he heard the song of the Sirens off the coast. The theater was surrounded by columns in various states of decay that must have once held up a protective thatch or wooden roof.

Behind the theater we came upon a remarkable water system, the largest cistern featuring vaulted arches above it. We had come to realize too late that there was no fresh water source on the island. Those cisterns were for capturing rain water, which, by the looks, hadn't fallen for a century or two. No one at the docks in Mykonos had reminded us to carry some along, and the three of us were parched beyond comfort, what with the wind, the sun and tramping about. But we persevered. Had to. The return boat wasn't for another hour. I inquired about buying bottles at the museum, but they were not available and the French archeologists in the adjoining lab weren't about to give away any of their meager stash. *Mais non, m'sieur.*

What they did give away, though, was information. All around the small museum were standing statues brought inside to protect them. But none of them had heads. Did ancient mobs chop them off like their fellow citizens at the Bastille for political revenge? *Mais non* again. The truth was that early pirates scouring the islands for treasure had little means of carrying off heavy marble statuary intact. They knew that when the figures were made, the heads were usually done separately and then screwed onto the

torsos. It was far easier to undo a head or two for quick sale on a ready market (like rapacious American museum curators?) to pay for their trouble. One expert added that there was an entire section of the Athens Archeological Museum devoted solely to severed marble heads – as opposed to busts that were designed to be portraits often with indications of shoulders.

Perhaps the most striking room in the Delos museum was the one containing nine of the remaining marble lions that once guarded the island's sacred lake. All sculpted alike, they dated from the 7th century B.C. One was left standing at the site of the Avenue of The Lions to display the effect of those larger than life beasts, seated on their haunches with front legs upright beneath alert, watchful heads. Ralph and I paused, looking above the high fractured pedestal at the one outdoors with great but different interests: for me it was the taut muscular structure still evident in the neck and head and overall beauty of the form; for more taciturn Ralph it was its history and meaning in the infinite scheme of things. I carried a small sketchbook in a back pocket, while he carried a detailed classical guidebook.

At the suggestion of a museum person for our final half hour, we called Arthur to follow us up the only high point of the island to get a panoramic back view. Mount Cynthos (whence the girl's name Cynthia) didn't look very difficult to climb, but proved otherwise. Dusty, rugged and loose pebbled, we slipped and crawled up much of it through spiky grass full of small crawling things like geckos, spiders and lizards. But it was worth it. The sight out across the flat expanse dotted with chunks of white marble and standing architectural reminders of ancient religious practices was fulfilling to both Ralph and me. It was clear that material had been confiscated over the centuries for buildings elsewhere, easy to do since it had always been an isolated spot. Another person at the museum intimated (it was not confirmed) that there might be a constellation visible in summer directly above us configured exactly like the islands of the Cyclades. I read that Delos was one of those sacred places deemed to have positive and negative energies, much like Stonehenge in England and Sedona in Arizona. Some left those places fully energized. I did. Positively.

The tender arrived right on time. Its bright green prow and red sides plowed through the bumpy Aegean waters like it knew what to expect. Looking back one last time at Delos was akin to slowly

closing the door on an attic full of dusty family relics no longer remembered but impossible to get rid of. Back on the Orpheus, the crew was preparing for tea, while the prodigal sun worshipers – Billy, Roger and Jack – changed into clothing that covered the burnt areas of their anatomies that hadn't seen daylight for years.

Arthur and I also showered and changed. When we all met for “tea” and learned that the others had spent the day in the buff on the beach, I said I thought I'd read that nude bathing was frowned on in the islands and asked if they'd seen any no-nude signs. Sure, one said, but they figured if they had to put up signs, then somebody else must have been doing it. So they took the chance, and then so did just about all the rest of the Summer69ers from the cruise. Nobody complained. “Tea Time” (always in quotes because of course it was when the first serious drinking of the evening began) got most of our group of 80 in one room at one time. It was a motley bunch from all over the U.S., but mostly, we surmised, from the mid-western and prairie states that lacked seacoasts: pale, slightly pudgy, with the tendency, at times like those, to break out with the kinds of outlandish getups they wouldn't dare try to get away with back home. Their mannerisms were self-consciously “studied”. To us New York sophisticates they were “so last year”.

The group director was also quite flashy in “theme” costumes like a “Stars Wars” silver jumpsuit with a foot-high stand-up pointed collar that swooped around his neck and down to join forces just above his belly button. Even the few times we all went on tours together, he managed to stand out. It was an era when men usually didn't bleach or streak their hair, and he had done both. He didn't need a held-up umbrella to let us know who was guide. For all his flash, however, he was a shrewd operator who, under that dazzling smile managed to keep the side trips interesting and informative – and on time. Aside from being a summer Fire Islander regular, we only knew that he owned a men's high end custom shirt establishment on the East Side and was known for a lavish entertaining style, evidence of which was the dinner he hosted for the captain, purser and other onboard dignitaries the first night in Mykonos (the Summer69ers were only one segment of the passenger list).

The next island to be visited was Patmos, often called the “Jerusalem of the Aegean” for the enormous fortress monastery dominating its central mount. With forty foot high granite walls surround-

ing it, the enclosed monastery was built over the foundations of a much earlier temple of Diana and dedicated to St. John, the Theologian, also known as the youngest and best loved of Jesus' disciples, who was exiled to the island in 95AD and remained for almost eighteen months, during which time he lived in a cave below the hilltop temple and was said to have received divine oracular messages through a long three-pronged fissure in the rock wall that Prochoros, a disciple of St. John, transcribed as Revelations, the last book of the Bible. St. John was also supposed to have composed the Fourth Gospel of the New Testament while living in the cave, which eventually became venerated as the Holy Grotto of the Revelation.

Spilling down the sides of the mount from the fortress, almost as afterthoughts, were the whitewashed box-like buildings housing the local inhabitants of Chora, some on obscure lanes made labyrinthine purposely to confuse marauding 11th and 12th century Norman and Saracens pirates. (By 1969 many of them had been thrown together into fairly sumptuous vacation homes by Athenian wealth.) The monastery itself had been in continuous operation for more than 800 years when we visited, yet no sign of human activity could be seen from the harbor because of the tightly knit network of alleys throughout the town.

Access to the island (that looked on the map like the top half of a seahorse) was from tenders that disgorged passengers at the tiny port of Skala. Along the wharves, ancient warehouses were already being reborn into Papadopoulos tourist shops and tavernas with newly painted round white tables and cobalt blue chairs. The jagged walkways up to the fortress were daunting for anyone except accustomed climbers. Except around the periphery of the island, no auto traffic was possible, so the choice had to be made to try to get to the halfway "Grotto", feel its undisputed vibes and then make *ouzo* rest stops at interval tavernas back down to the Aegean, or go for broke and attempt to reach the topmost monastery and its treasures with the knowledge that it would have to be the only visit possible in the time allowed.

Arthur and Ralph were both religious and history minded and started out immediately for the top of the mount. The rest of us made it to the cave and stopped. The Holy Grotto of the Revelation (its official name) was a revelation in itself: one half overhanging – and overwhelming – plain rough grey rock swooping down

with a low brow on one side of the grotto, balanced by an intricately carved Byzantine frontal with icons and three large candle stands, swamped by an electrified brass chandelier. It was as if one side was trying desperately to civilize the other, the other stubbornly refusing to be housebroken.

A few steps away, down a rugged rocky path was the *Apokolypsis*, or Cave of the Apocolypse, a small grotto where John was supposed to have slept nightly, the hollow in the rock where his head rested now outlined by a ribbon of beaten silver. Almost everything we learned about John's life – and writings – on Patmos were subject to controversy and question, even the saint himself, except to the true believer. It had never been established that he was the John of Jesus' disciples or a later holy figure. Over centuries his writings had suffered so many deletions, additions, and changes, not to say difficulties of translating Greek into Latin into English, etc., that no pure text any longer existed. The only glimmer of certainty was the fact that in Revelations 1:9, was written, "I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ."

One young man who could give us "the real true" knowledge about St. John and his writings was the one we met on our way down the mount. We had stopped for refreshments at an outdoor taverna with bouzouki music evident in the background. Seeking shelter from the broiling sun we found it in the purple shade of one of its arches. Also seated there was a bearded, stringy haired, self-styled "hippie", barefoot and confidant in his dusty milieu. He was American but preferred not to reveal his place of origin or name. He had been on Patmos for some time, living off and on with visiting tourists or in one of the hermits' caves that pockmarked the land-scape. For a drink he offered bits of his "true knowledge" about the St. John "business".

He had read much of Revelations "backwards then forwards, the only way" and admired it as the "trippiest" book in the Bible. According to him, when John was exiled to Patmos (in a long line of famous exiles starting way back with Orestes, on the run from the Furies for matricide), he discovered the true wonder of the isle –hallucinogenic mushrooms, *aminita muscaria*, known the world over since ancient times for the best out-of-mind highs and vivid imagery. And the very best quality was to be found on Patmos. It

was the reason the hippie himself had wound up there. Take any random page of Revelations, he asserted, and read it while high and it would produce the effect John intended. He used as an example a passage from Revelations 12: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.." and later, "...another wonder of heaven... a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns and seven heads upon his heads, ...and his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven..." Now you tell me, man, the hippie exclaimed, read that over a few mushrooms and see if you don't go totally psyched! We decided, as fascinating as it was, to keep the facts from Arthur and Ralph when they came down from above.

At the next taverna stop there was another young man of a very different sort. Clad in the long wide black robes of a monk and heavily bearded, he also spoke English and claimed to have relatives in Astoria, Queens. Billy started a conversation with him ("always been attracted to men in uniform"), while Jack, Roger and I smiled old-maid-aunt approval from a distance. The young man was a novice and not very happy with things above in the monastery. Too political. The Superior rode around in a Bentley (where, we didn't know, since there was only one road at the base of the mount). The only fun was after hours when the tourists had all been rowed back to their cruise ships and the young monks could swing unobserved into the nights. He invited Billy to join him in a taverna later that evening. Billy gave him his business card as a gesture, knowing full well there were no tenders after curfew. The chances of the young monk showing up at Billy's door in Manhattan were as likely as Billy ever showing up after hours in downtown Patmos.

We all gathered back at Skala to await our tender, Arthur and Ralph with renewed religious fervor. They had spent their day within the confines of the monastery, which, it turned out, comprised five smaller churches thrown together. Ralph was interested to learn that there was a workshop session starting in two weeks to study historic bookbinding, his avid avocation. Arthur found the feeling of peace at the top revitalizing. However, pointing to a red buoy out in the harbor beyond the beach where we waited, he related one of the miracles he had read concerning St. John that almost matched our hippie's for weirdness. It involved a supposed

duel of miracles performed by St. John and the evil magician Yenoupas. At the urging of a priest from the temple of Apollo, Yenoupas intended his miracle to be the bringing back of effigies of the dead from the sea by diving under and retrieving them near where that buoy bobbed. St. John on the other hand prayed to God that Yenoupas be petrified while submerged. God won, ending the duel but at a price: forever after those petrified remains under the harbor would continue to stink of sulphur. So *that* was what we smelled on the way back to the Orpheus.

A pattern was beginning to appear on our tour of the Greek Islands. To find what was special on each, it was necessary to check off the apparent usual suspects: glorious beaches, temple ruins to Greek, Roman or even Egyptian deities, an early Greek amphitheatre or two, picture-perfect harbors with huddled fishing boats and white-washed dwellings. We had to delve into our guidebooks for what could be discovered – or uncovered – that was unique about each place. That we did during group discussions each evening after dinner to prepare us for the morrow. The Orpheus traveled at night, so we woke up every day to new vistas and prospects, and wanted to be ready.

After Patmos, we sailed eastward toward the shores of Turkey. The wake-up call was 7a.m. for all those who wished to board the launch to the then sleepy town of Bodrum on the coast to visit the site of one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World, *The Mausoleum of Halicarnassus*. Jack and I were the only ones interested enough to be aroused that early, as, it turned out, was the case with most of the other passengers. There were no more than two dozen of us shivering under windbreakers with eyes squinted eastward into the sun that was just then defining the ramparts of what turned out to be the Castle of St. Peter. In a sense we were looking at the Mausoleum, since, though it had been destroyed eons ago, probably by earthquake, and nothing was left standing but the mosaic-tiled base it was set on, all the building blocks had been requisitioned for use in constructing the Castle, and much of the statuary and pillars ground up for mortar.

Begun in 1494 by the Knights of St. John of Malta, a hospitaler order formed in the eleventh century to aid early Crusaders in Jerusalem, it had withstood earthquakes and invasions. The local knights had even become famous for developing a certain breed of dogs that could track down refugees and bring them to safety,

much like the St. Bernards in Switzerland. But of the original Mausoleum nothing was left to contemplate but its footprint and early elevation drawings – and the universal term for a large tomb. It was begun in 351B.C. as the tomb for King Mausolus of Caria, a Persian satrap (he died in 353 B.C.), by his wife and sister Queen Artemisia, who had vague Greek deity connections. Little remarkable was remembered about him except his tomb, that on completion stood to over 140 feet in height with 36 columns and a marble statue between each, and a stepped pyramid roof bearing at its pinnacle a sculpture of four massive horses pulling a chariot in which statues of Mausolus and Artemisia rode. It was deemed one of the Seven Wonders by Philo of Byzantium and stood intact for centuries even through Alexander's conquest of 334B.C. and repeated pirate attacks in 62 A.D. It was finally destroyed by earthquake between 1000 and 1400 A.D.

In 1846 the British Museum sent archeologists to Halikarnassus, now called Bodrum, to search out more treasure. Bits and pieces of the roof, one chariot wheel, and the statues of Mausolus and Artemisia as well as bas-relief sculptures that adorned the base, were found and sent back to London where a special Mausoleum Room was created. And there things remained. Bodrum went back to being a quiet simple little town of old ruins, old fishermen and not-so-old sponge divers.

But a poet and author named Cevat Sakir (1890–1973) would change all that. Exiled to Bodrum Castle in the early days of the Turkish Republic for inflammatory rhetoric, he fell in love with the area and its inhabitants. His books about the fishermen and divers became very popular, and he, himself, began to be called the Halikarnassus Fisherman. The government decided he was having too good a time there and hauled him back to serve out the last year of his sentence in Istanbul.

He grew homesick for Bodrum, however, and when he was released he returned to live there the rest of his life. He was a vocal advocate for wider recognition of the area, and in time quiet Bodrum was to become a booming summer resort and the ruins famous throughout the world. In his zeal, he wrote a letter to the Queen of England asking for the immediate return of the exquisite works of art “pilfered” from the Mausoleum and left in such sad forgotten state in the British Museum for over a century. “..... they are not finding their true place under foggy and grey London skies.”

The letter he got back in response stated archly, “Thank you for reminding us of the matter, we have painted the ceiling where the Mausoleum is located in blue.”

Undaunted, he continued to be a thorn in the queen’s side, but also encouraged local builders, who had been creating unique regional sailing boats called *gulets* for centuries, to make them bigger and better. By 1969 they were world renowned and coveted.

Jack and I didn’t have time to visit the burgeoning Museum of Underwater Archeology being erected nearby, nor the ubiquitous Greek amphitheatre beyond that. But he was pleased to be able to say he’d actually been on the spot where one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World stood (even though, after a gander at the black and white renderings of what is was supposed to look like, he announced in withering tone and flick of a wrist that the real thing must have been “gawd-awful”). By the time the launch returned to the Orpheus the sun was overhead and our gang was eating lunch on deck. We joined them with our updates.

As we spoke, the ship began to cruise slightly southwest from Bodrum and the Turkish coast to what turned out to be one of the loveliest Greek isles we would visit. Kos was not only a lush place, replete with mountains, highlands, fertile plains, hot springs and vineyards. It was also uniquely special as the birthplace of the “Father of Medicine”, Hippocrates (460-357 B.C.). Every graduating medical student in the world since his time would take the Hippocratic Oath or some variant to become a practicing physician. He trained at the Dream Temple in Kos (a few columns remained standing), and may have been a pupil of Heroditus, the inventor of therapeutic exercises to treat diseases. He taught medicine under the shade of a precursor of the current 500+-year old tree – still called the Hippocratus Plane Tree – in the center of Kos, badly hollowed out and buttressed by iron scaffolding, but still alive and considered the largest of its kind in Europe. Under the tree we found a fountain made of an ancient sarcophagus that continued to spill out its waters of purification. Roger was the first to quaff a cupped handful and pronounced himself cured (of what he didn’t say, but if he ever later was to find out, we had the snapshot to prove it).

Several years after the death of Hippocrates, followers of Asklepios, the god of healing and medicine, founded the first Asklepion, or sanatoria, high on a serene setting overlooking the red tiled

roofs of the town and the Aegean back toward Bodrum and Asia Minor. Students studied Hippocrates' methods of healing and medicine. The Asklepeion became the most famous hospital in antiquity as a place of cleanliness and light where patients were cared for medically, as opposed to, until that time, wide use of demonology. Little was remembered of his personal life, but his medical achievements also made him renowned in his own time, as documented by Plato and Aristotle. Another well-known medical practitioner living and teaching at Kos about the same time was Irofilos, the Father of Anatomy, who was the first to describe nerves as sensory organs that branch from the brain.

The Asklepeion continued to operate until 554 A.D. when it was damaged by earthquakes. (Another in a long line partly wiped out the island in 1933.) We toured the four levels of ruins, on the second of which one could easily discern the dormitories where young interns once lived. From there, using towers of the huge Neratzia Fortress guarding the harbor as guides, we made our way down steep steps back toward the center of town. Looking about, I kept thinking, on a more up-to-date note, how difficult to comprehend what that quiet lovely island of Kos was like during the harsh occupation by Nazis in 1943, or how it must have been when the British liberated it in 1945, or even when it was reunited with Greece again in 1948.

Along our way down, at a cool spot called the Plaka, where bright peacocks pranced and preened, we rested and pulled out sodas and pastries purchased earlier. No sooner had we opened the wrappings than the aloof peacocks turned into rampaging vultures, quickly pecking away almost every crumb of food from our laps. Astonished, but unvanquished, we shouted and shooed them off, Billy brandishing his soda bottle, defying any of them to try getting a sip. The incident was good comic relief – Orestes taunting the Furies.

Rhodes (*Rhodos*) was our next destination. The largest of the Dodecanese island chain, it was famous for its own member of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World – the Colossus, a 100-foot high bronze statue of the sun god Apollo (Helios in Greek) that straddled the entrance to the harbor of Mandraki. The architect Chares of Lindos (the town on the island that was our destination) erected it about 280 B.C. It was to commemorate, according to Pindar, the mythological birth of the island from the union of Hel-

ios and the nymph Rhode, hence the name. *Rhoda* (rose) is a pink hibiscus native to the island. The Colossus, which held aloft a huge torch, Statue-of-Liberty-like, doubled as a lighthouse until it was destroyed in 224B.C. by an earthquake. Pieces of it were taken by Egyptians who used the island as a common marketplace for trade with countries of Asia Minor.

Our ship was able to dock directly by the harbor of Lindos, the ancient village on the southeast coast of Rhodes. Dominated by an enormous rock acropolis, its whitewashed dwellings fanned back down the three protected sides of it, leaving the remaining seaside cliffs, high as 30-story city buildings, to drop precipitously into the Aegean. Atop the acropolis was what we had come to see. The earliest ruins were that of a Dorian temple to Athena Lindia dating from 300 B.C., that the Italians who controlled the island in the early part of the 20th century tried to reconstruct from surrounding remains. The job was badly bungled and abandoned. Later efforts by others had been sporadic at best.

The Knights of St. John had taken over the area around 1317 A.D. and erected thick walls around the entire imposing 380-foot acropolis that also included other early religious edifices of varied Byzantine, Venetian, Arab and Turkish architecture, and the knights' own municipal structures. They carved out a long steep flight of steps up to the top out of the rock cliff itself—a dizzying climb. Near the beginning of them, again cut into the rock face, was a bas-relief carving of a Rhodian trireme (warship) made in about 180 B.C. with a statue of General Agesandros on it, all by the sculptor Pythokritos, responsible for creating the famed Winged Victory of Samothrace, now in the Louvre in Paris.

As noted, the climb up the actual acropolis steps was treacherous and arduous enough, but reaching them wasn't easy either. From the center of Lindos one either had to hike up the steep and winding village streets on foot, or hire donkeys that locals called "taxis" because no actual motor vehicles were allowed anywhere in the vicinity. All six of us chose to brave the acropolis challenge, but decided to rent beasts of burden for the lower trek from town up to where the rock steps began, which was as far as they went anyway. As we all had experienced on previous such outings, no matter where in the world it occurred, beasts of burden always carried us as frighteningly close to the edges of precipices as possible (out of spite for being called beasts?). Lindos was no exception.

Along some cliffs they even managed to kick little stones over the rims to make us keenly aware of the Doppler effect.-ect-ect-ect.

Unfortunately, Arthur was extremely susceptible to heights (back in New York he balked at taking elevators to floors more than four stories high). So flirting with fate on Lindos was not fun for him. When the party dismounted to ascend the steps, he felt dizzy and disoriented, and chose to sit out the rest of the adventure on a nearby grassy knoll. Besides, that long one-sided, rail-less stone staircase to heaven was not something he thought he could physically manage. The rest of us found it just about as difficult, especially the descent, with nothing but air between us and the Aegean. Also after the struggle to the summit, it was disappointingly like *déjà vu* on top anyway: same ramparts, same ruins, same tourists, same relentless sun, same cobalt sky. Jack, archly surveying the territory, nailed it precisely as usual, with a shrug, "So what else is new?" Breathless from the climb, we rested on some ancient marble slabs, poked around a little and headed back. It actually took longer to go down than up. We were so exhausted and sweaty by the time we joined Arthur, we too flopped onto the grass.

Arthur, meanwhile, had experienced intestinal problems and was anxiously waiting for someone to go back to the ship with him at once. On foot. No donkeys. So I volunteered. We made our way down remembered lanes, now eerily quiet. (Quiet because, as we learned later, the inhabitants indulged at that time of afternoon in their own version of siesta.) Doors were closed and windows shuttered. Not a sound. As we rounded one corner to descend again, we were startled by a solitary elderly woman in apron, head scarf and broom sweeping her stoop. Arthur, caught off guard, reared back like a horse and, like a horse, left a resounding fart. It echoed past all the housefronts. She broke into screaming laughter and cackled something that brought neighboring Lindian women to their windows. They in turn laughed, cackled and pointed as we passed, turning the entire block into a cacophonous Greek chorus. We were mortified. It seemed we would never reach the next bend. Keeping my gaze on the black and white pebbles crunching underfoot, the only thing that came to mind was that they were called "*chochlaki*", so I repeated *chochlaki, chochlaki, chochlaki* to myself until we were safely out of sight.

Eventually the chocklaki gave way to a concrete embankment where we sat on a bench by the waterfront, allowing

the adrenalin rush to subside and the other members to catch up and chuckle at our ethnic encounter. Back on the Orpheus Arthur found relief, and a check of the itinerary showed that the next day we would sail west to Crete, the largest and historically most important of all the Greek isles. Besides, it was not like any we'd visited and might hopefully rekindle our flagging interest. Over cocktails we began boning up on Knossos, the illustrious Bronze Age archeological site near the town of Heraklion on the north shore.

We were all aware from childhood of the characters involved in the myths surrounding Knossos: King Minos of Crete; the term "Labyrinth"; the frightening (and frightful) Minotaur and Theseus, the Athenian hero who eventually slew it; Daedalus and his son Icarus, the ill-fated first aviator. And so on.

The site, as noted, near the modern Heraklion, had had a very long history of human habitation, beginning with the founding of the first Neolithic settlement there circa 1700 BC. In Greek legend, on Mt. Ida in Crete, Rhea, the Earth Mother, gave birth to Zeus. He was reared on a diet of goat's milk and honey and attended by nymphs and youths who guarded him against his vengeful father Cronos. When grown he fathered Minos who became the king of Knossos and all the Aegean.

Poseidon, (the Roman Neptune) god of the Mediterranean Sea, was also a son of Cronos and Rhea. He gave Minos a white bull to be sacrificed, but Minos refused to have it killed. Angered, Poseidon arranged for Minos' wife Pasiphae to fall in love and mate with the Cretan Bull. The offspring was the Minotaur, a horrible monster half man and half bull. Minos had an elaborate mazelike structure called a Labyrinth (after the word *labrys* referring to a double-bladed axe), designed and constructed by the architect Daedalus, in which prisoners were kept. If any of them found a way to the end of it, there was the Minotaur to greet and impale them – or worse.

The Athenian youth Theseus had fallen in love with Ariadne, King Minos' daughter. He conspired with Daedalus to show him the way to the end of the Labyrinth so he could kill the Minotaur and claim Ariadne as his bride. Since Daedalus knew the way, of course, he led Theseus through the maze, cleverly trailing string to guide his return and escape from Knossos with Ariadne after he slew the monster. Infuriated at the death of the Minotaur, King

Minos imprisoned both Daedalus and his son Icarus in the Labyrinth. There clever Daedalus fashioned wings for the two of them to make their escape up instead of out. The rest of the myth was well known. Brash Icarus defied his father's warning to avoid flying near the sun, and did anyway. The wax holding the wings together melted and he fell into the sea – Poseidon's sea – in a flurry of feathers and drowned.

The ruins of Knossos were discovered first in 1878 by Minos Kalokairinos, a Cretan merchant and antiquarian. He excavated a few parts of the west wing, but it wasn't until 1900 that the archeologist Sir Arthur Evans, a wealthy English gentleman, was able to purchase the entire site and begin massive excavations. (It was said that if the Turk who was selling the six acres hadn't exaggerated the number of olive trees included in the sale and angered German digger Heinrich Schlieman's business sense, Schlieman might have owned it instead of Evans, to insensitively and disastrously excavate it as he did Troy.) Archeology became a field of academic and scientific teamwork later, but a century before, wealthy and self-taught persons could –and did – take on such projects alone with hired laborers. Evans was one of those, albeit with the means to hire a large staff of workers and, best of all, also persuade the already renowned archeologist Dr. Duncan Mackenzie to join in the dig. Together they unearthed first the Great Palace consisting of 1,000 rooms (which may have just been the Labyrinth itself for all anybody knew; the rooms led from one into another instead of from usual main hallways). Among them the central courtyard, the royal quarters, shrines, workshops, store rooms, the throne and banquet halls.

We began our own discovery in the so-called House of Frescoes located northwest of the palace. Most unusual and beautiful were the rich wall decorations, dating from the 15th – 12th centuries B.C. One striking feature of the art was the coloring on the figures: all men were ruddy-skinned, the women milky white; the figures were youthful, with no signs of small children or elderly; most were engaged in athletic feats, the most notable that of bull-leaping that showed naked young men grasping the bulls' horns as others were already vaulting over the animals' backs. Experts never seemed to have fully determined whether those activities were part of a ritual or a sport, or perhaps representations of a mythical dance with the Great Bull. I was particularly interested in the still vivid coloring

and motion the participants conveyed, as well as an undeniable erotic element that pervaded everything.

From there we meandered (a word often used in describing labyrinths) up to the Great Palace itself on Kephala Hill with its far-reaching vistas of the Aegean below. Its layout was basically an equally sided cross with main entrances on each of its four cardinal faces. It contained, besides those 1000-plus rooms, a theater and extensive storerooms leading from grain mills, oil and wine presses, and an elaborate Throne Room with a prominent alabaster seat. Around the seat on three sides of the room were gypsum benches under remnants of frescoed walls. Evans, in one of his few lapses in judgment, hired contemporary artists to “restore” some of the paintings that experts later deemed to be fancifully contrived fabrications. The room faced an open courtyard surrounded by other rooms, a design feature echoed all over the palace to allow light to enter everywhere evenly.

What appealed most to the home builder in Billy and me were the pillars throughout the entire complex. Known as Minoan Columns, they were unlike the stone ones characteristic of other Greek edifices. While the Greek ones were smaller at the top and wider at the bottom to give the illusion of great height, these were originally of cypress wood, smaller at the bottom and wider at the top, the result of inverting the trunks to prevent sprouting in place. They were painted red and mounted on stone bases with round, pillow-like capitals. (Another of Evans’ adaptations was to replace them all with concrete replicas, albeit painted the same.) The remarkable thing was that those original columns had held up the structure, five stories high in places.

South of the palace along a paved way we came to what was called the *Caravanserai*. A kind of reception hall and hospice, it had rooms equipped with baths and more decorated wall paintings. Further on, the Queen’s chambers boasted what must have been the first example of a flush toilet — to Arthur’s delight. It was a seat over a drain flushed by pouring water from a jug. Similarly the tub in the adjoining bathroom had to be filled by someone heating, carrying and pouring water into it, and drained by being overturned into a floor drain or bailed out. Truly exceptional finds! Fresh water was carried from springs by gravity through a closed system of tapered, rope tied terra cotta pipes. Likewise waste drainage was led to a sewer much further down the hills. Who said plumbing

was a modern invention?

Jack, who, since learning of the phallic displays at Delos, had become a dedicated devotee of Dionysus, led the rest of us to his discovery: a private house of the 2nd century Roman period called the Villa of Dionysus for the outstandingly splendid mosaics depicting the god of pleasure in special rooms believed employed by his local cult. Not to be undone, Roger, our real estate salesman, tried to interest us in some portable ceramic hearths he uncovered that were used to heat the structures with olive oil when chill winds swept down the mount. It took Ralph, however, to point out that, although Minoans possessed all the technology to develop closed metal stoves that would have made more efficient radiators, it didn't seem to be within their grasp. In fact, the Minoan age and especially Knossos, aside from conjecture, seemed to be beyond the grasp of most archeologists, who had debated its culture ever since the finds were excavated. Was it primarily a monarch's domain, a religious entity – or both? Or neither? The only thing fairly certain was that it was not a military site, since no fortifications or weapons stores were ever found. The only other certainty was that Minoan civilization was a remarkably unmilitaristic one and Knossos remained active until destroyed by fire in the 14th century BC.

The six of us were “destroyed” by the experience also. We made our way back to the ship sunburned, exhausted, but elated, all agreeing it was the most exciting and enlightening episode of the cruise to date. We were also covered head to foot with dust blown up by the ever present winds during the long day. Showers were a must, but for Roger that posed a problem. His “rug” was matted with dust like the rest of him, so he decided to wear into the stall with only the single little piece of tape he'd stuck up under the front of it. (He was notoriously stingy in the tape department). When he emerged soaking wet and saw himself in the mirror, he gasped. The hairpiece (sown onto fragile lace) had shrunk from the back. What to do? He peeled it off, donned a baseball cap and came to me for help.

I gently spread it with my fingers until it was stretched back to a semblance of its former shape, and told him the best way to dry it would be to pat it smoothly all around the box-like EXIT light that glowed red above my door. It was bound to emit enough even heat overnight to dry it. When I arose at 9am and lifted it off, it had dried all right, but also retained the exact boxy shape of the light

fixture and wouldn't flatten out. When Roger stuck the usual bit of tape up under the front edge and put it on, he resembled Frankenstein's square-headed monster. In the old days he would simply have laughed it off. But now that he was so conscious of his looks, he was furious. I taped all around the edge of the lace and pressed it firmly down on his head. So far so good. We all went in for breakfast. Minutes later, when he turned to get a waiter's attention, the toupee popped back up into the box shape. It would have made Mary Shelley smile. It certainly elicited guffaws from the rest of our table. Roger was not amused. He demanded I do something about it. He and I went to his cabin and removed it. I spritzed it lightly under the shower and placed it flat within a folded towel and then under his suitcase. He would have to wear the cap the rest of that day.

It was crucial that he look his best that night, because after breakfast all the members of Summer69 were asked to meet the Purser in the Atlas Lounge. He informed us that the Captain had been very pleased with our demeanor during the cruise and invited us to enter the crew's quarters after the last dance of the evening and mingle freely with the seamen. The door to the hold would be unlocked at 10:30 "for our pleasure". An expectant buzz filled the room. This was not in the itinerary. We six joked a little about the prospects, topped by Jack's tart query, *sotto voce*, "What do you wear to a hold". But we all sensed that this was something out of the ordinary, and we'd be stupid not to take advantage of it. Roger glared at me and muttered through clenched teeth that his 'hair' had damn well better be ready.

That entire day would be spent on board the Orpheus as it made its way northward in the direction of the last two isles we were to visit, Hydra and Aegina, before returning back to Pyraeus, the port of Athens. The six of us luxuriated on deck chairs in a loose circle near the rails. The sea was never more vibrant, the sky never more intense, the air never more intoxicating. After hearing the Purser's words earlier, we all had our minds on the same subject, or, as Billy in one of his rare inspired moments put it, we were not a sex-tet for nothing. Resident professor Ralph took it upon himself to enlighten the rest of us at length about the ways of ancient Greek male/male love making. For once, the Greeks hadn't a word for it. They included it with all other forms of intercourse, male and female, under just one heading – *aphrodisia* (love). This had baffled

linguistic experts for centuries, since male/male love was held in highest regard in old Greek culture and was considered one of the factors in its ultimate rise and success. Ralph mentioned one out-standing example among many in Alexander the Great and his beloved companion Hephaestion. The terms “heterosexual” and “homosexual” didn’t even come into being until the 19th century. The physician Karoly Maria Benkert coined “homosexual”, using the Greek word *homos* meaning “same” (not the Latin *homo*, man) with the Latin *sex* in 1869. Likewise “heterosexual” (the Greek *hetero* meaning roughly “other”) was first published in 1892 in Chad-dock’s translation of Krafft-Ebbings epic *Psychopathic Sexualis*. Neither term came into general use as we knew it until the 1920s. Ralph continued:

The prominent form of male/youth relationship was an older man (usually in his early 30s) coming on to a youth, oftentimes taking him to live in his own home alongside his wife and whatever offspring, until such age as the youth matured enough to follow suit in setting up his own household with his own younger lover. The original older man, besides being physically intimate, usually acted as mentor and father figure in fostering the youth’s development into, in Athens at least, an acceptable citizen of state.

In some instances, as with the Spartans, man/youth partnering was taken to its ultimate extremes, where they inseparably lived, loved, fought and died side by side in battles. The Greeks did have a term for that called *padierastia* (literally “boy love”). In modern usage, of course, “pederasty” had a whole different connotation – and not a very positive one. As to the bodily acts themselves, Ralph indicated that historians agree from ancient writings and depictions on vessels that they indulged mainly in a method described as *intercrural* (between thighs) – belly to belly with the older man on top humping between the youth’s thighs without anal penetration. Official intercourse was widely frowned upon, the same experts claimed. That brought whoops of open-mouthed disbelief from our circle and led Jack to conclude that to be widely frowned on, it must have been widely practiced. With that, Ralph’s brief but illuminating lecture ended and further discourse on the subject just, well, petered out. The remainder of the afternoon on deck was spent mindlessly dozing in the Aegean sun.

So to the night of the unlocked door: Roger found that his “rug” was dry and duly flattened. It stayed snugly atop his baldness as he

primped about like Cinderella on ball night, while the others proceeded with simpler preparations for the main event. Arthur and I were hesitant about actual involvement, but nevertheless curious. So we waited until after 11pm to descend the metal stairs leading to the ship's hold. We assumed the coupling must have taken place hurriedly because there wasn't a soul in sight along the dimly lit corridor that was the crew's quarters. Double-decker bunks lined one long wall, hung with heavy canvas flaps for privacy. As we strode the length, expectations of glimpsing Dionysian debauchery firsthand dimmed and we had to be content with mental images from the muffled grunts, groans and gasps behind flaps rhythmically tented out by jabbing elbows and knees, but no sign of real flesh.

Up ahead Arthur beckoned me to the far end of the room where another unlocked door gave onto a narrow landing that in turn led, by way of another down staircase, to the very bowels of the ship, the engine room. The noise was palpable. Leaning against the railing were three older members of the engine crew with slicked back hair and fresh overalls over decidedly portly midsections. The nearest engineer spread his moustache in a wide smile at me and indicated the stairs with nods of his head. His hands thrust down inside his overall indicated something else. Arthur tugged my sleeve to leave, so I gave the guy a wan wave and followed back through the den of iniquity, then up and out the still magically unlocked door. Some orgy.

The next morning silence reigned over our breakfast table. All but Ralph stared dumbly at their food, euphoria nowhere. We never got any closer to learning about their night out/in, either. And I never asked, realizing there were some experiences that were too personal to share with even the best of friends, and let it go at that. We joined the passengers debarking at Hydra, the penultimate stop on the cruise, and I noticed the same reticence among other Summer69-ers as well. Even the standard trek up the mount, the donkey "taxis", the temple to Athena, the hawkers, the lack of cars, bikes, even roads, elicited none of the usual interest. Ralph, Arthur and I were the only ones who seemed to notice, for example, the inordinate number of small cats everywhere (the island was famous for them), the platoons of crowing roosters, and artists openly displaying work on the outer walls of studios (the island was considered to be the most painted of them all).

Hydra dated from prehistory and purportedly was the home of the monstrous water serpent with nine heads that gave the island its name. Each time a head was cut off, two more grew in its place. The hero Hercules eventually killed it by cauterizing the necks after each beheading. A less legendary figure, but still a menace, the dictator Papadopoulos had been hard at work ringing the harbor with tourist accommodations and restaurants in an attempt to lure them (and inhabitants) from Athens for day or weekend outings. It seemed to be working. Already the yachts of the international set and well-heeled ship owners were bunched together along the wharves like bananas. The American author Henry Miller had anticipated its new awakening in his vivid and sometimes raucous novel, *The Colossus of Maroussi* in 1941. But beyond that cluttered fringe the island itself remained as it probably had always been – a pretty and timeless cameo of all the best qualities of glorious Greece in miniature.

A number of monasteries and churches dotted the slopes, one of the largest built from marble blocks scavenged from the Temple of Poseidon on nearby Poros. How such settlements survived for so long was a mystery to visitors, because they, and all the other communities and inhabitants, had no local sources of water. An earthquake had struck over 200 years earlier, drying up all the wells, and ever since, water had to be shipped to it daily from the mainland. Soon, after the completion of all the temples to Papadopoulos, the shipments would have to be round the clock.

Our visit was brief and details hastily memorized, for during lunch. Orpheus whisked us away to our last island destination, Aegina. Far less spectacular than any of the predecessors, but situated conveniently at the very center of the Saronic Gulf, in antiquity it was the center of cultural activity that flourished from the Neolithic to the Hellenic eras of Greek civilization. In mythology it was the place where Zeus had a fling with the nymph Aegina and produced a son, Aecaeus. At the son's request, Zeus populated the island so Aecaeus could have subjects in his kingdom. He furnished it with plantings of grain, vines, almonds, olives, and the nuts that have remained a special commodity to the present, especially pistachios.

The most important ruin on the island was the Temple of Aphaia, considered the most spectacular of all late Archaic Greece structures. Nice, but after weeks of temple ruins and sexual ex-

exploits of wayward mythological misfits, what interested me most in the here and now, and as a coin fancier, was that Aegina was the first city (*polis*) ever to mint coins, according to the ancient historian Ephorus. They were minted in silver and in posterity known as “turtles” because their relief design resembled one. I had known the coin term “turtle” for years, but never knew its origin before. Upon seeing actual numismatic specimens in the local archeological museum, I excitedly told my friends that I’d seen real turtles for the first time. They stared at me like I’d lost it. The thrill had to remain mine alone.

Our ship stayed docked in the harbor for the night and there were the usual last evening on board festivities that we joined mainly for the spirits and wine flowing freely. Not mentioned much before because none of them appealed to any of us except as items to sample, the two main spirits were *ouzo* (an anise-flavored aperitif, best with ice and a little water) and *metaxa* (apricot brandy). The most unusual wine was *retsina* (pine resin flavored, good with 7up and ice as a refreshing long cool drink – our collective choice). But since they were all being offered gratis that night, we indulged fully.

As the party wound down about 11pm, I caught a glimpse of Billy leaving with one of our young waiters, and Roger with another, and figured the magical door to the hold was still unlocked. It was evident the next morning at Piraeus, as we were leaving the Orpheus for the last time. Making our way along the pier with our packs, we looked back up and saw most of the young crew members lined up along the top rail. They waved enthusiastically and several shouted, “Goodbye, Leslie Fay” and “I love you, Leslie Fay”. Billy had obviously handed out his business cards from the current fashion house where he was employed, and they assumed that was his name. Some of the other departing Summer69 guys heard it and, pointing at him, knowingly roared with laughter. Embarrassed, he stared straight ahead as he stalked off and out of the corner of his mouth snarled to us, “Shut up and keep walking.”

That was the end of our wonderful cruise of the Greek Isles, but not the end of our sojourn. We had talked about skipping the Summer69 land tour and taking a long weekend in Istanbul. Five of us would go, and leave Ralph in Athens to pursue his bookbinding interests. Jack made flight and hotel arrangements from the ship on the last day and after a bumpy taxi ride we found ourselves at Ell-

inikon International Air Terminal again, boarding a plane for the two hour jaunt east to Istanbul, but still rocking on sea legs.

Istanbul, like Rome, was built on seven hills and bisected into what had been Thrace on the north and Anatolia to the south by a great waterway called the Bosphorus, important historically because it was the only water connection between the Mediterranean Ocean and the Black Sea. Jack, with his infinite taste, had found us a charming small hotel situated on the Bosphorus and overlooking the Black Sea, nestled in a grove of shade trees. While he was checking us in at the front desk, Arthur, Billy, Roger and I waited in front of the lone elevator door. Suddenly it slid open and out stepped two women, one of whom bumped into Arthur in passing. He turned to look at her and they both stepped back in amazement. They had been neighbors for a number of years on Morton Street in Greenwich Village, in adjacent digs. She still lived there. Arthur subsequently moved a mere five blocks away, yet neither had seen the other in the intervening decade or more. Small world, said one. What are you doing here? asked the other. Same as you. Imagine, here in Istanbul! Crazy. With nothing further to say, the women left.

Jack came with the keys and we crowded into the rickety elevator. On the way up to our floor, Arthur, still taken aback, admitted he hadn't introduced her because at the moment he couldn't remember her name. And I added that we all had to remember that we had decided, because of the brevity of the visit, to hone in on only four points of interest: Hagia Sophia, The Blue Mosque, Topkapi Palace and the Grand Bazaar. We found our suite of rooms very adequate, especially since it included a covered balcony with a great distant panorama of the Black Sea. Wasting no time, we headed for the nearest site, Hagia Sophia. Meaning "Holy Wisdom", it was far larger than expected, with a massive central dome. Built between 532 and 537 A.D. as a patriarchal basilica, designed in Byzantine style by architects Anthemios and Issidoros, on orders of the Emperor Justinian for the patriarch of Constantinople's Eastern Orthodox Church. It remained the largest cathedral in the world for a thousand years. In 1453 Sultan Menmed II of the Ottoman Empire had it converted into a mosque. Most of the religious articles were removed and the priceless gold and colored mosaic

wall decorations were plastered over. With minarets added it became the prototype for many succeeding mosque designs, including the one described later. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, it languished unused until 1935, when an expert team of restorers painstakingly removed the plaster and it was made into a museum open to the public.

Traversing the spare cavernous interior, with many out of the way corners badly lit, it was especially thrilling to catch brief glints of the spectacular golden mosaic murals, some floating so high and wide that at times it required looking up from a prone position to appreciate them fully. The other guys went through the edifice relatively quickly, but I stayed back with Arthur to, in my case, let their grandeur, age and Byzantine austerity affect my artistic senses; for Arthur, a devout Christian with a special interest in the effects of church structures on worship of all kinds, it was to absorb their religious intent.

From a top floor window could be seen the outlines of the second site on our itinerary and within walking distance of where we stood: six pencil-thin minarets defining the parameters of a similar structure, with a cluster of small domes surrounding an immense central one. Generally mosques had but four such towers, in one of which the prayer caller (*muezzin*) had to climb up a circular stair case five times daily to call the faithful to prayers (later via loudspeakers). But it was the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, named for the ruler who decreed it should have more minarets – and everything else – than any other in the land. Famously known as the Blue Mosque, in time it became so widely recognizable that it was depicted on the 1969 Turkish 500 lira banknotes we were carrying. The blue appellation came from the color of the lower interior wall tiles with tulip motifs that alternated with 200 stained glass windows of intricate design. The upper gallery walls had tiles with flowers, fruits and cypresses, but the areas above were painted blue, and, we noticed, badly in need of repair. Built between 1609 and 1616, it also boasted enormous crystal chandeliers that, strangely enough, had ostrich eggs nestled in them. (I learned later they were for repelling spiders!)

On the southeast wall was the *mihrab*, an extravagantly carved marble niche that indicated the direction that Muslims should face when praying. To its right was the *minbar*, another highly decorated raised pulpit where the *Imam* stood to deliver sermons (in the

case of the Blue Mosque, Fridays at noon.) But, jarringly out of place, a large complicated suspended black metal frame superstructure holding several dozen or more glaring down-directed bulbs in glass shades was thrust out in a wide circle from above the *mihrab*, looking more like film studio paraphernalia than simple overhead lighting for worship. Anyway, into this august setting entered the five of us, after having removed our shoes, tied shoestrings together and washed our feet under a water spigot outside. Told that a memorial service was under way for a well-known public official who had died a few months earlier, the ushers led us far to the left of the pulpit and the assembled congregation (men only), and indicated in low tones that we should sit quietly cross-legged and not leave until the service was over. They then gave us each a cornucopia of rolled newspaper brimming with hard candies. A custom, one whispered.

What we sat cross-legged on was about a thousand years' accumulation of oriental rugs of all sizes and degrees of wear, one atop another, donated by the faithful. They covered the entire in depth. We dutifully tried to pay attention as men in suits one after another ascended the *minbar* to mumble eulogies on microphones. We understood nothing and soon it became apparent that the odor rising from the rugs was not from one of us, but a thousand years' accumulation of bare feet, washed or not. Jack and Roger, neither religiously inclined in any language, became bored and diddled with their hard candies. Billy's head began bobbing, and after an audible snore and a jab to the ribs, he simply slumped sideways for a little nap. Arthur was fascinated with the form the service took, and I whiled away the time mentally criticizing the architectural flaws of the interior.

What brought everything to a climax was when a little old lady in a head scarf who we'd watched pushing a vintage carpet sweeper on a long cord back and forth in monotonous rows, approached us. Without looking up, she vacuumed around us twice and continued on her regular rows, leaving us a deserted island. The effect was like pulling a finger out of a dyke. One repressed smile led to a titter led to a giggle led to a chuckle led to a guffaw led to choked laughter. We realized we simply had to get out of there before we were in convulsions. Hands over mouths we snuck along the back wall that was farthest from the activities and out a side door. Then burst into side-splitting howls. Someone asked

Billy if he knew he'd dozed off back in there. He replied that happened whenever he was in such a place and the reason why he never went to church. Roger said he never realized Jack had such big feet until he saw them bare. Jack said he'd never noticed my small bald spot until he sat behind it. While picking out our shoes among the dozens rowed outside the mosque doors, Arthur intimated that, after seeing all those orientals back there, he'd like to look for a small one for our Village apartment. I agreed and we kept the idea in the back of our minds for the next day when we would be at the Grand Bazaar. Wiping the laugh off our faces, we straightened up to prepare for an afternoon at the third site on our agenda, Topkapi Palace.

It was within easy walking distance from the previous sites, so we set out on foot. We hadn't been forewarned that it was the time of year for the unpredictable and deadly sirocco winds that whipped up off the coast of Crete and created dust storms sometimes so intense that inhabitants had to keep indoors or cover heads and arms outside from being literally sand blasted without notice. Just such a storm was picking up momentum unbeknownst to us as we headed for the palace. We were waiting in line to cross the street to reach the elaborate main entrance when just such a gust blew up behind us. It ballooned skirts, tossed sand into eyes and lifted Roger's toupee from the back of his head (where he again hadn't taped all around as I'd suggested). Attached only at the forehead, it flew straight up like a great hairy headdress. Some local kids, there to check out the tourists, suddenly pointed at Roger, whooped and and shouted, "Amareekin Een-diun! Amareekin Een-diun!" and beat a circle around him in a Turkish version of a war dance. He was not amused, but since sand had seeped under the thing, his only choice was to flip it back down, hide it with a base-ball cap, and motion for the rest of us to follow him across to the palace entrance. His livid cheeks said it all.

We hadn't eaten since early morning, so we decided before arriving to take lunch at the Palace. Wrong choice. When we got there it was already crowded with visitors, and when we eventually got seated, the fare was far from special and horrendously pricey. It left a bad taste in our wallets, but not for long. All was forgotten once we entered the palace proper, where the taste was, to put it mildly, for excessively dazzling ostentation. Topkapi Sarayi, to give it its correct name, was the brainchild of Sultan Mehmed II, a

a 23 year old Ottoman ruler, who requisitioned the land, previously a Byzantine stronghold on the third hill of Constantinople, in 1459, mainly because of its cool proximity to the Bosphorus. Originally consisting four large courtyards with many adjacent smaller buildings around them, it expanded over time to include a mosque, bakery, hospital and mint, and many more rooms. None of the structures were more than two stories high, however, again to take advantage of the prevailing summer breezes.

Succeeding Ottoman sultans moved living quarters across the river, and by 1853, Topkapi was kept for displays that boggled the mind: entire thrones of gold inlaid with diamonds, one early one of Murad IV also inlaid with ivory and nacre; the hilt of the gilt dagger of Mahmud I was topped with three large emeralds and, of all things, a gold watch with an emerald lid surrounded by diamonds (Jack's assessment: "If he wasn't such a piss-elegant queen, he'd have worn a wrist watch like the rest of us"). That particular sword gained fame as the object of a heist depicted in the film "Topkapi" (1964) directed by Jules Dassin, and starring Melina Mercouri and Maximilian Schell. Peter Ustanov won an Oscar for his efforts – no gold watch.

The crowning glory of the entire Treasury, however, was the Spoonmaker's Diamond: 86 carats of razzle-dazzle glitter set in silver and encircled by 49 cut diamonds. Its discovery was as fascinating as the gem, for, as legend had it, a *vizier* (civil authority) bought it for a mere pittance in the bazaar. The owner, thinking it was too large to be real, sold it as a crystal. Nearby an emerald pendant with 48 strands of matching pearls had been crafted as a gift for the tomb of Muhammad in Mecca, but was returned after it was no longer within the borders of the shrinking Ottoman Empire. Near the end of the display, as an antidote to the eye-glazing sumptuousness of all those jewels, was a plain solid gold cradle in which the (hundreds of) newborn sons of former sultans were first presented to their fathers. Billy muttered something about the hand that rocks the solid gold cradle.....

As we left the Treasury I asked if any others noticed how dusty most of the displays appeared, and wondered if the sirocco had seeped behind the glass cases. The answer from an attendant was yes, but the cases would not be cleaned until after the dust had subsided. (Several years later a friend visited there and reported them spotless.) Arthur's turn was next and he chose the Chamber

of Sacred Relics.

The room itself was almost more interesting than its contents, as important as they were. It resembled a highly ornate half-scale mosque, every inch of its surfaces covered with decorative calligraphy. It was said verses from the Koran were chanted there twenty-four hours a day. Arthur first spotted an unexpected staff attributed to Moses (which he doubted), but the largest group of visitors hovered around the cloak of Muhammed, flanked by one of his teeth and a lock of his hair. They seemed to be silently intoning prayers. We tiptoed to the exit so as not to offend them with any offhand ribald outbursts, and sauntered across a handsomely manicured courtyard leading to The Harem.

In an antechamber was The Miniature and Portrait Gallery. The miniatures delighted me the most, their gem-like colors and exquisite details being as extraordinary as their history revealing. But the other boys were anxious to get on to The Harem proper, the tramps. As sumptuous as it was, it didn't live up to my expectations. Or maybe our eyes were beginning to glaze over from all the glitz and gilt we'd just waded through. Roger, on the other hand, indicated that he would gladly go under the knife to become a eunuch there (the only way a male was allowed in) for he had always had a penchant (not his word) for seductive veils and heavy eye shadow, and here it would be for real. Hearing that, I suddenly realized we were seeing Topkapi as a kind of transvestite theme park. And maybe it was — an over the top never-never land where fantasies were everyday realities. Certainly the portraits on the walls of bygone sultans in 3-foot high feathered and jeweled turbans, glittering robes, pearl necklaces by the yard and a rock or two on every finger had to be out of some ancient Carmen Miranda epic. The Harem was also by far the most popular and crowded room(s) of the entire palace. So, who knew? There may have been any number of closet Rogers there getting their vicarious kicks.

Topkapi was not to be missed when in Istanbul, but it was no match for, say, the Alhambra in Spain — too compartmented and sprawling to be beautiful. Leaving from the final exit was the neatest part of the visit — the one thing that was free: there before us was a breathtaking panoramic view of Asia *and* Europe on either side of the Bosphorus. That topped a full and very eventful day in Istanbul and we had the sore feet to prove it. We hiked back to our hotel, took showers, and, donning in-house bathrobes, sat

on the balcony with cool drinks and ciggies, watching evening descend over the Black Sea until lights came on along the shore and passing water traffic became silhouettes.

We were awakened early next morning to the sounds of bells and a hurdy-gurdy down on the dirt lane alongside the hotel. Billie was the first to investigate. He yelled for the rest of us to get up and come quickly to the balcony. Below was a gypsy musician dressed in a green swallow-tail coat and red fez grinding on the instrument. (We suddenly realized that we hadn't seen a fez on anyone yet in Turkey until then.) On his shoulder perched a little monkey on a long chain, dressed just like its master. Before them were three live brown bears with bells around their necks dancing around each other to the music. They would stop. The gypsy would look up and gesture for money with his free hand. Guests would drop change down from balconies into a large tin tub, and the noisy clink would get them started again. Coins that missed the tub were quickly retrieved by the monkey and stashed into a pocket. We were so captivated that we pooled all our coins and dropped them at intervals to keep the animals waltzing. It was one of those magical moments that exist in their own time and space apart from occurring circumstances. We would not soon forget it.

That morning, our last in Istanbul, we decided to eschew the ubiquitous taxi in the ubiquitous traffic jams for a more civilized ride on the *Zeytinburnu* tram to the Grand Bazaar. A small town in itself, it was the largest covered market in the world. Its miles of passageways contained a bank, mosque, police stations, restaurants, and, at last count in 1969, over 1200 shops. It also contained what must have been some of the most persistent and, at times arrogant, merchants alive. Just a quick glance at their wares, be it jewelry, pottery, art, carpets, whatever, and they were at you like flies to flypaper. We pretended to be interested in ceiling and wall decorations overhead – attractive enough in an overdone way – just to keep from accidentally eyeballing one of them. Sunglasses helped, but even then they seemed to sense you looking in their direction, turning it into a game of hide-and-peek.

It didn't take long to check out the merchandise. It was, for the most part, geared for the tourist trade (Jack's summation: "Quel crap"), with maybe here and there an inkling of more elevated taste. Arthur, still adamant about buying an oriental rug, had luckily asked ahead of the hotel desk manager which merchant might

be the most honest and have the best quality of orientals, and he not only got a name but also a drawn map to help locate him. Our companions continued their star gazing, but I went with him, as much out of curiosity as desire. The shop was set apart somewhat from the mainstream, which seemed to augur well, and we didn't require a fly swatter on the merchant, who kept his distance and was mannerly and soft-spoken.

It didn't take much time or persuasion for Arthur to choose the right one and right size. It was three down in a deep stack, obviously thread-worn, with a bald spot on the *mihrab* where the owner had touched his head often while kneeling at prayers. It was the "oldness" of the rug that seemed to attract Arthur most, although the surrounding borders had discernible designs and colors. An embarrassed, half-hearted haggling routine followed for a few minutes until the price was agreed on and the address noted for shipping. Arthur walked away successfully flashing his gap-toothed smile. He looked relieved that it was over. We caught up with our buddies who meanwhile had purchased a few "mother gifts" (*i.e.* no critical comments about taste, guys), and we settled on lunch in one of the less crowded taverns in the Bazaar. Over Turkish coffee and greasy sandwiches we agreed that the most fun was in watching other shoppers try their pathetic tour-guide haggling on practiced pro vendors – the vendors always coming out ahead, usually with a sly wink to onlookers. Thinking back over the long weekend, though, the hurdy-gurdy and dancing bears won the fondest memory prize, hands down.

Back to Ellinikon Airport in Athens, we were met by Ralph, who had booked us into the rather primitive back street hotel in which he was staying. It was only for one night, but the signs in English that read: HOT WATER ONLY FROM 7-9 AM AND 6-8PM and NO SLEEPING IN BATHTUBS were indicators that we would not be happy campers there on return to Athens from Delphi, our next destination. Jack immediately stormed up the several blocks to Constitution (*Syntagma*) Square and found accommodations at the posh King George II Hotel for our final days in Athens – and Greece. A second floor suite, no less, facing the square. We dutifully rose and showered at 8 to be on time at the bus station for the 3-hour morning express to Delphi. Plenty of time en route to bone up on the place that was revered throughout the Greek

world as the navel of the earth.

Mention of Delphi immediately brought to mind the Delphic Oracle, the most important one in the classical world, at the pan-hellenic sanctuary dedicated to Apollo, dating as far back as the 8th century BC. The priestess of the oracle was known as the *Pythia*, and it was thought that Apollo spoke through that woman, who had to be old, have had a pure life and been chosen by local peasants. Before making pronouncements (usually on the 7th of the month), the priestess, or more correctly, prophetess, purified herself by bathing in water from the Kerna fountain, incensing herself with barley smoke and chewing laurel leaves. She then sat on a tripod seat over the opening in the earth where Apollo supposedly slew Python, a frightful dragon deity that guarded a fissure in the rock that emitted intoxicating vapors (thought to be a gas high in ethylene) that caused her to swoon into trances and “rave”—probably in tongues. The results would be translated (and highly edited) by priests of the temple into elegant pronouncements for distribution. The Delphic oracle was consulted by high and low citizens on everything from undertaking wars to settling domestic matters, and the practice continued until the emperor Theodosius I closed the site down in 395 A.D., mainly for lack of qualified old women as the town’s population shrank to a small colony. But by then the tradition of athletes from all over the Greek world gathering there every four years to compete in Pythian Games was so established and lasting that they were considered the real precursors of our modern Olympics.

The bus ride from Athens took us northwestward through central Greece, across rising verdant plateaus that eventually formed the slopes of Mount Parnassus, and ascended high up to the town itself, with vistas over the Corinthian Gulf. The comfortable hotel where we’d been booked had a multilingual staff speaking intelligible English that, after Turkey, was a welcomed relief. Following a very ethnic lunch featuring grape leaves and feta cheese, the six of us set out to do our touring from the top down along the *via sacra* instead of the reverse, so anxious were we to see and experience the renowned Stadium on the mountain top in full sun. The hike was more strenuous than anticipated and our energy was sapped by the time we reached it, evidenced by how small the town looked on glancing back over the precipice.

We were too pooped to try any Olympian feats, and were con-

tent to pass under the partially ruined arch entrance and plunk down on the stone seating, placed there in the 2nd century AD in the reign of Herodus Atticus, that held 6500 spectators and boasted a track 177 meters long and more than 25 meters wide, and astoundingly, was the last major remodeling it underwent since it was first built in the 5th century BC. All we could do was attempt to visualize the games, involving the most beautiful and strong youths, chosen from all over the Greek city states for their athletic prowess and agility. They competed naked, using olive oil to smooth their bodies and look appealing. Those who were heavily endowed wore a *kynodesme* or skimpy jock strap to restrain the penis. The first games were running races or *stade*, hence the word “stadium”, but later chariot racing, boxing, wrestling and *pentathlon*, that included the last two plus javelin, discus throwing and long jumping, were added, all performed in the nude. The prize was either a crown of laurel leaves or an olive branch, and sometimes foodstuffs. It wasn’t difficult for us to conjure up those scenes. We all had vivid imaginations – and memories.

The descent from Parnassus was steep but easy along the *via sacra*. We purposely passed by major archeological sites to save them for the next day, and made for the modern town of Delphi itself. On the main road, at the foot of the complex, was the Delphi Archeological Museum. Led by Ralph, we examined an impressive collection of artifacts associated with the ancient city, especially the one we’d really come to see, a famous sculpture “Charioteer”. Sometimes called the most important work from classic times, it seemed to have reflected that moment in history between stylized representation and idealized realism – circa 470 B.C by an unknown sculptor – that changed art forever. A single standing youth dressed in a long pleated tunic from neck to ankles, belted high at the waist and sleeveless. Six feet tall and made mostly of bronze that had aged with a soft green patina, the torso turned slightly to one side with the right arm grasping the tangled remains of reins (the left arm was missing). His lips and eyelashes were of copper, his eyes of onyx, and his hair was in the shape of a tightly curled cloche encircled by a headband with tracings of silver. He looked as though he were presenting his team of horses (fragments nearby) after victory, but with humble demeanor instead of hubris. It was thought to be part of a larger grouping, created to honor Apollo Delphinios. I was bemused by the calm, smoothly defined aris-

tocratic face, and thought of Michelangelo's "David", wondering if that later perfect example of idealized realism would have evolved at all without "Charioteer" coming first.

Among the many marble fragments unearthed from the hillside complex, were reliefs from the Siphnian Treasury, and the handsome sculpture of the youth Antinous, Emperor Hadrian's lover who accidentally drowned in the Nile in 130 B.C., Hadrian being so bereft that he had statues of the youth dedicated in every place he conquered. Ralph drew our attention to the other most outstanding item of historical interest: the earliest known notation of music, found on a wall of the Athenian Treasury on the Sacred Way. It consisted of two songs: one dating from 138 B.C. and assumed written for a boy's choir, composed by Athenios; the other dating from around 128 B.C., composed by Limenios for instruments. They were both believed written for the Pythian Games that occurred every 4 years. Impossible as the fragment was to decipher by modern musical techniques (I, a trained pianist, couldn't make anything out of it at all – it was abstract as a Jackson Pollock painting), it was nevertheless remarkable to know that there were experts somewhere who believed they recognized what it was and what it represented. The next morning we set out again to hike Parnassus, stopping at each important site on the way up. Foremost was the Temple of Apollo that, unfortunately, had only retained its footprint foundation and six existing columns. But inside was the *adyton*, the center where the oracle was situated along with the seat of Pythia. We sought advice over the hole, but to no avail. So it was on to another ruin after the next turn of the *via sacra* – the Treasury of Athens. It was built to commemorate that city's victory at the Battle of Salamis, after being advised by the oracle to put its faith in its "wooden walls". Told by priests that meant their navy, they won the sea conflict. Partially restored, it was the most important of a number of city treasuries unearthed at Delphi, "treasury" meaning the place where offerings to Apollo were kept from *tithes* or tenths of the spoils of war. The procedure was the precursor of our modern banking system.

Finding no immediate funds available, we trudged on up to the hill to the outdoor Theatre where its top rows offered a breathtaking view of the entire sanctuary and the valley below. Remodeled several times since its origin in the 4th century B.C., it still contained 35 rows in an ascending semi-circle that seated 5,000 spec-

tators around a central flat disc-like performing area called an *orchestra* or “dancing place”. Each theatergoer was supposed to be able to see and hear performances clearly, even down to a whisper. Experimenting, we had Billy and Roger stand mid-stage and talk low while we tried out various distances up and down the limestone bleachers. We heard every four-letter word they hissed at each other, believe it or not. And they in turn heard our boos and catcalls as they horsed around in campy Isadora Duncan fashion waving pocket handkerchiefs. (They would have been hooted off the stage in 1300 B.C. too.) Actually the *orchestra* was used mainly during the Pythian Games for plays, poetry readings and musical events. But as impressive as the expansive auditorium and stage ruins were, they were no match for the grandeur of the vista beyond. Again we sat a long while admiring the slopes of Parnassus rising past us to the stadium above and then swooping down into the dark valley below and on to the Corinthian Gulf, our senses sharpened by breezes wafting the scent of nearby olive groves. It was a magnificent setting for a hallowed place. Apollo Delphinios must have been pleased.

The last important site for the day was the *Gymnasium*, a bit farther out of town. On the way Ralph filled us in about such places. Firstly, the word derived from *gymnos*, in Greek meaning “naked” and the entire word indicated a place for nude or semi-nude activities. We were all ears. Every large Greek city state had one, but this was the oldest existing from Classic times. As large as the Stadium, it was built on two levels, the topmost including an indoor and outdoor track for running. Beneath was the *palaestra* that held ball courts, wrestling and boxing areas, a changing room and a cold pool (hot baths were introduced later by the Romans). Nearby were tubs for sitz baths and douches, again cold, fed by water from the sacred Castalian spring, deemed to have miraculous powers. Not only youthful athletes, but all visitors to the sacred site were required to avail themselves of those facilities before entering. As indicated, even the Oracle herself had to bath and wash her hair there before making pronouncements, which prompted me to wonder if she ever suffered a “bad hair day” on the job that might have provoked a serious conflict. The Gang of Six was ready for showers by then, too, hot or cold – well, hot. We trekked back up to the hotel to clean up and doze before dinner.

Conversation at and following the evening repast centered

mainly on conjecture about those ancient baths: were they only for working out? Or were they, like the baths in New York, also for making out? Jack let go with one of his Confusian style zingers, "Face it, guys, there's nothing new under the sun but sin, and sin never grows old." End of subject. But not quite. In a decidedly Dionysian frame of mind, we set out for the little taverna we'd noticed on first arrival, a slope away from the town with not much around it but more olive groves. Hardly the kickiest looking place, it resembled an American roadhouse of yesteryear. Set up a flight of steps, it did have bouzouki music blaring from out its one lighted window and discernible laughter inside. The interior was brightly lit and couples were dancing – or trying to. The women were all of a certain age and size, spoke a Slavic language and obviously off of a same tour bus; the men, all young and obviously brought in to entertain them, were trying desperately to show off a few basic dance steps. They turned out to be the six waiters we'd had at the hotel, with stiff smiles that said they were not enjoying it at all.

We sat in straight chairs around the periphery, drinking local beer and tapping to the beat of a three-piece combo, music that, in spite of its loudness, was rather catchy. One of the waiters, a handsome tall Adonis approached me after the number, smiled and asked in halting English if we would like to join in an all-male handkerchief dance. I knew Billy and Roger had the right props, but the rest of us had to borrow napkins from the management. We were fast learners, however, and quickly eclipsed the slower Slavs, who soon melted away with their guide. The waiters seemed happier. We certainly were. Drinking and dancing, drinking and dancing. Finally Adonis said the joint was closing after the next round, and would we like to stroll with them up into the olive groves. Would we! The final round was guzzled in a flash and out into the blackness we lurched, the only indication of human activity anywhere around. Linked arm in arm across the country road we attempted to march, laughing and singing American pop songs as we went (the youths knew all the American lyrics in spite of being able to discourse in only restaurant English). Well into the darkness of the grove, we broke off into natural pairings, choosing partners we'd had on the ascent. Adonis and I found a soft mound away from the others to perform our ancient ritual.

The next morning around the breakfast table, with the same

guer when in residence. Jack ordered lunch sent up. It arrived on a dolly spread with a white cloth and small gold rimmed plates holding dainty sandwiches and salads, pushed by an earnest formally dressed waiter. He was followed by another carrying a bottle of wine and ice bucket. They served each of us, in our underwear, on the lady chairs, as if that was how all guests dressed for lunch. Jack was in heaven. The rest of us planned to go out and get some real food as soon as the wine was finished off.

At first sight downtown Athens was disappointingly drab: blocky 4-6-storied concrete buildings unrelieved by softening green touches. Here and there on the few side streets we walked, an occasional tiny Greek Orthodox Church was squeezed between them, with glowing interiors busy with icons and brass fixtures. But other than that, the pickings were slim. Deciding to rest up for the much anticipated night visit to the Acropolis, we grabbed take-out and sodas and went back to Constitution Square to munch and watch the pass. Billy got chummy with an off-duty member of the palace guard and we learned a little about them. Called *evzones*, they were the ultimate elite, chosen from all over Greece for their good looks and 6-foot-5 or more height. Their distinctive uniforms featured the famous flared kilt (*fustenella*), made from white fabric with 400 pleats (for the 400 years of Ottoman occupation); white leggings with tasseled garters; clumpy black slippers with big black pompoms; an embroidered grey or navy vest over a white blouse with full sleeves; and topped by a fez dangling one long black tassel. Arthur and I were especially fascinated because they were a feature of every Greek Independence Day in New York City. The sight of a platoon of those giants, with their unique slide-and-stomp stride leading the Parade up Fifth Avenue, was sexy, frightening and thrilling and we seldom missed it.

As evening approached we headed in the direction of the Acropolis, planning to have drinks and eat in the Plaka or Monastiraki, the entertainment and restaurant areas just below the ridge of it. Walking across dun-dull Athens, one realized the old truth that there was only one reason it existed – the Parthenon. And, we would have added, the thrill of being there on a moonlit night. We wolfed down plates of *bakalairo* (fried codfish), then joined the throngs lumbering up the steep incline of Mount Lycabettus to the Acropolis (literally, Upper City). The first sight of the Parthenon, gleaming in all its ruined splendor by moonlight, simply took the

breath away. One had to stop and adjust to the visual impact. The main Doric-colonnaded structure in the center, a temple to Athena Nike of Pentelic marble from distant mountains, was ordered by Pericles, built by architects Kallikraties and Iktinos, with the entire work supervised by the famous sculptor Phidias. It took 9 years to erect and was completed in 438 B.C. Over time it went from a temple to a church to a mosque to a Turkish storage place for gunpowder. In 1687 avenging Venetians blew it up, and ever since the scattered remnants had been in the process of being slowly and methodically pieced back together again. In 1969 it was still far from complete, but there was scaffolding evident in the interior near where the 42 foot gold and ivory statue of Athena once stood, along with masonry tools, showing work was continuing.

Moonlight accentuated the details of the structure and lent a ghostly glow to its surroundings. The *Erechtheum*, butting up against the main temple, was a later addition, probably between 425-409 B.C. It contained copies of the 6 world-renowned *Caryatids*, sculpted columns that held up the roof (5 of the originals were taken to the local museum for safe keeping, the 6th went with the still controversial cache that Lord Elgin acquired – the Greeks say stole – and presented to the British Museum in 1806; I'd seen it there and it looked very lonely). They were figures of fully draped women with baskets on their heads surrounding the porch that was home to the sacred snake the Athenians used to feed honey cakes. The night we looked in, it was home only to a bedraggled bunch of stray dogs, but that didn't dim its historic luster.

Turning eyes away to focus into the darkness beyond the edge of the acropolis, the view over the city of Athens by night was astounding: the city lights emphasized the density of pollution hanging over it like fog. It was bound to eventually affect the ancient structures on the acropolis, which was frightening. Because, as one writer put it, "Everything that makes western civilization unique starts from here" Over the south side of the acropolis, far below, could be seen the Theater of Dionysus, the first all-stone outdoor amphitheater and home of Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripedes and Aristophanes. The young giant palace guard whom Billy had befriended that afternoon, told of an earlier *evzone* from his unit who was on duty standing watch under the city's green flag atop the acropolis during the Nazi occupation of Athens in World War II. At gunpoint a Nazi officer ordered him to remove

the flag at once and replace it with one bearing a swastika. The *ev-zone* calmly lowered the green one, wrapped it around his own body and jumped to his death in the theater below. Those guys not only had to look good, they also needed to be brave. A green flag was again flying high over the spot where we currently stood. Just to one side of the theatre was another outcrop, The Rock of Aeropagus, (Mars Hill) where the Apostle Paul spoke to the Athenians in 51 A.D., and in more recent times known to some as Blow Hill (go figure).

Physically the acropolis itself resembled a large flat mesa atop Mount Lycabettus, and was situated centrally in Athens, so it could be seen from almost every quarter. In pre-history it was a settled town with dwellings, but it had not been lived on since becoming a sacred site in the 6th century B.C. As such, nothing unrelated to the acts of worship was allowed on it. Even the night we were there, guards confiscated bottles of water and drinks of any kind along with snack food. Strewing papers and wrappers about was forbidden as well. It was interesting to see how docile and observant the crowds of visitors were in complying that night. There was no running up and down steps or swinging around columns or undue shouting. An air of reverence and awe pervaded as visitors explored the vast interior. The color had something to do with it: though marble, it was no longer white, but had become a warm overall eggshell tone from age that, though stained and pitted from millennia, still glowed with uncanny inner luminescence in the moonlight. The steps, colonnades and figure-carved pediments were all one color. Public buildings the world over had copied that appearance ever since, assuming it to be the epitome of classic style and taste, and therefore excellent for conveying the appearance of stability and majestic strength (think municipal architecture and bank fronts).

But the original Parthenon looked nothing like that. I was shocked to see a scaled mock-up of it in a museum display some years before: it looked like a cross between a circus wagon and a Puerto Rican Day parade. Traces of brilliant reds, Egyptian blues, green/blues, yellows and golds had all been detected on the sides of the building, the colonnades, and all the figures in the friezes on the pediments.

The reason was thought to be that at the great distance they were from the viewer, colors extended visibility, making the figures,

especially, clearer to “read”. The realization made one ponder what the copy-cat buildings in, say, Washington, D.C., would have looked like if its architects had followed “true classic” form. A traveling carnival? The knowledge was a bit of a letdown.

It was difficult for us to tear ourselves away from the Acropolis and its treasures, but we had a flight home to New York very early the next morning. The moon lit our way down past the tiny Temple of Athena Nike, where a bronze statue of the goddess, the only sculpture actually known to have been by Phidias, once stood in the center. The main gate, the *Propylaea* was the last vestige of Classical Greece that we encountered. After that it was the present shock of late night trekking through the Plaka with its eternal bouzouki blare, and then back to our Louis Quinze digs. Next day, after 10 hours on Olympic Airways (said to be owned by our erstwhile upstairs neighbor Onassis), we arrived in New York. We didn’t really say goodbye to each other. With a smile and wave of the hand, we split. We all knew it had been a once-in-a-lifetime thing. No words needed.

A month later Billy, Arthur, Roger, and I ferried to Fire Island, where it had all begun. A few faded posters for the cruise still clung to pier poles. We helped Henry and Carl close up for the winter, all the while regaling them with tales of travel they didn’t really want to hear. The 6 p.m. ferry back to the mainland was the final leg. Summer ’69 had turned to fall.

New York, NY 1969, re-edited 7/1/2009

POST SCRIPT

Arthur’s oriental rug was waiting for him when we got back to Waverly Place. It looked fine under the glass topped coffee table, glowing with Anatolian memories in the lamp light. The next year he and I bought/built a small summer house on Nantucket Island and shipped it there in June. It was the beginning of an oriental mania that kept up until we’d covered every possible bare space on the wide-panel floor boards throughout. That rug was placed in such a way that everyone entering the living room had to walk on or sit near it, so it was always “eye accessible”. Time and wear ne-

never seemed to dull its appeal.

Over dozens of years, it prompted such remarks as “I think that is a really Important rug” or “that rug looks like it’s worth a great deal” from so many house guests so many times that we began to believe it ourselves. After one self-proclaimed “expert” in the field repeated the phrases ad nauseum during one visit, that was the deciding clincher – we would take it somewhere and find out if it was so or not.

At summer’s end in 1987 we rolled it up and took it back to New York, where there was sure to be someone to give it the once over. It was again spread out beneath the coffee table for safe keeping, as we checked the Yellow Pages for carpet auction houses. Most of them charged exorbitant fees and had long waiting lists. Then, as if by fate, an announcement appeared in the New York Times to the effect that a special day had been set aside by the acclaimed Parke-Bernet Gallery auction house on Madison Avenue (later Sotheby’s) for anyone with one antique item to bring it in to be appraised free of charge. The only requirement was to call beforehand to be given a number and a time of arrival. We complied immediately, and spent the Sunday prior to the date checking out the windows of the numerous oriental rug dealers along the Avenue. In one was what looked like a very close match to ours. The place was closed, but by squinting at the edge of the glass, we saw the price tag that made us ecstatic – similar size and design: \$4,500. Another further along was going for over \$5,000.

Assuming we had it made, we sailed into the auction house with our bundle of joy on the appointed day and waited... and waited... and waited. The suspense was agony. Some were coming out looking like there was a death in the family. Others came out walking 3 inches off the ground. When our turn came, we were led to a long table with a lanky owl-eyed “expert” at one end. “Unfurl, unfurl.” He took one hard look at the design, felt the back, smelled it, and pronounced it an antique prayer rug, but of no real value – a few hundred, tops, likely carried by some camel driver for daily prayers. He waved us out.

Undeterred, we returned it to Nantucket. When anyone asked the Big Question, we answer, “Oh, priceless” and were still around in 2009 – Arthur at 96, I at 80 – to fib about it with impunity, for Billy was dead of AIDS, Roger of heart failure, Ralph of Alzheimers, and Jack had long since disappeared.

Nantucket, MA. July 13, 2009

The next morning around the breakfast table, with the same young men waiting on us, four of our Six – Billy, Roger, Jack and Ralph kept mum about their rites of passage the previous night, but it was clear, from surreptitious smiles when eye contact was made between the servers and the served, who had been with whom. Arthur said he and his partner had simply sat on a chunk of old ruin as the young man practiced conversational English. But I was ready to admit that my Dionysian interlude had more than lived up to expectations. Maybe, as Ralph suggested on the ship, certain intimate acts may have been frowned upon in ancient Athens, but in Delphi that night, it was more ‘heaven knows, anything goes’!

Later, waiting on the bus for the driver, I sat on the window seat with Ralph beside me. Adonis stood alone on the hotel terrace scanning the faces. When he saw mine, he smiled broadly and waved goodbye. Seeing me wave back at the handsome youth (whose dream was someday to go to Athens and study Phys. Ed.), Ralph muttered out of the side of his mouth “We-e-ell, guess who hit the jackpot last night”, and punched my shoulder. The bus rumbled on down the hill. I looked back as the ancient site receded deeper into the folds of its sacred mountain, and realized Delphi, the Oracle, Adonis, all of it, had become another memorable magical moment – with the magic in the memory.

Athens was hot and sticky when we arrived at the King George II Hotel three hours later. It had been hand picked by Jack and, of course, was far too grand. It stood opposite *Syntagma* (Constitution) Square, just down from the Parliament Palace, and we could see the changing of the guard every hour from our second floor suite. Yes, *suite*. The main drawing room was huge, with floor to ceiling French windows that opened onto the tree-dotted square. Very Louis Quinze. Very pink. Satin divans with undulating backs vied with delicate brocaded lady chairs around the room, under enormous gilt-framed mirrors that reflected how stupid we looked in such surroundings. The porter, whom Jack had befriended (or more) when we first arrived in Greece, handed him the oversized key and with it the knowledge that the suite directly above us was that of Aristotle Onassis and his recent bride Jackie Kennedy. We were duly impressed as we dropped our sweaty togs on the floor and padded about the bedrooms – there were three, equally ornate – in underwear and socks, which became *costumes de ri-*



THE KITEMAN COMETH

Mention the name Al Hartig on Nantucket Island in the nineteen-eighties or nineties and ten-to-one you'd likely receive a blank stare. But mention the Nantucket Kiteman and you'd get instant recognition. The Nantucket Kiteman was world renowned. Al Hartig was not. Yet they were one in the same.

Alfred E. Hartig was born in Passaic, New Jersey in 1922. As a child growing up in nearby Clifton, he became fascinated by all things that flew, sailed the ocean, plumbed the earth's depths or explored outer space. Most of his after school time was spent building ship and plane models. Later during World War II while stationed in New Guinea he took to designing posters for the local PX and plaques for officers' desks, incorporating some of those early designs. That led to more serious stuff. No Gauguin, he was still able to capture something of his appreciation of South Seas exotica in bright watercolors that improved with practice. So much so that he began thinking of himself as an artist.

After the war he headed for New York City and the Art Students League on the G.I. Bill, taking on a meaningless part-time job and then in 1952 a very meaningful wife named Betty Finley, all in the course of a year. Ship modeling was still his favorite pastime however. Whenever one was finished he would try it out weekends on the wading pond in Central Park. But one day in the early 1960s he and Betty arrived to find the pond drained dry. Seemed the city was suffering a severe drought and its colorful new mayor John Lindsay had shut off all public fountains and municipal pools until further notice (famously suggesting everyone "shower with a friend").

Al and Betty, a clipper under each arm, started back across the

park. When they reached an open area called the Sheep Meadow they saw people of all ages flying colorful kites, some, Al noted, without much success. Watching closely he was certain he could improve their flight. He bought a standard plastic “delta” model (roughly a wide triangular shape) and began experimenting.

That one tore on the first try so he decided to handcraft his own. Betty bought some red cloth, dowels, string, needles and thread. He cut a template from an open newspaper page using the outline of the old kite, enlarging it slightly to compensate for the material’s heft. He then inserted weights mid-point at the bottom to eliminate the need for a tail and added a fabric keel beneath for stability with brass eyelets for attaching a seine line. Betty carefully turned and hemmed the edges all around. With the dowels in place they returned to the Meadow and let go. It flew like a charm. They were jubilant. Back home Al stenciled a big black German cross on each wing and christened it The Red Baron. It was to become a classic.

He then designed another immediately, and then another, each a lofty delight. On a trial run testing new designs, a well dressed matron approached across the grass and picked up an orange kite that had just landed near Betty. She thrust a ten dollar bill into Betty’s hand, muttered something about never having seen such beauty in all her life, and walked off with it. It had cost a buck to make. Dumbfounded but pleased, they wondered: Might it be possible to turn this hobby into a small cottage industry?

It might and soon was. But before plunging headlong into the marketplace they had to agree on a few rules: the kites must be individually made of highest quality sturdy cloth (eventually 35% percent polyester and 65% cotton), hand crafted (including the wood dowels), with each test flown by Al before being sold. That meant fewer potential sales, so they could never be mass marketed. But hopefully the demand would eventually exceed the output, making them coveted items. It did and sooner than expected.

The creation and mail order sales of his most successful kite Valkyrie, patented in 1967, allowed the couple to give up day jobs and devote all their efforts to the new business, at first from their cramped apartment. The Valkyrie was a streamlined version of the Red Baron with a six-foot wing span and several inches cut off the wing struts toward the triangle’s apex to keep it from gliding forward in an air pocket, allowing the string holder more control.

Everyone who saw it in action wanted one, including Paul E. Garber, Historian of the National Air and Space Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. A devoted kiter himself, he bought one after reading an article praising it in the American Kiteflyers Association's *Kite Tales* that ended: "For sheer simplicity and superb flying ability, we have never seen an equal to this kite." He had another Valkyrie raise the nation's flag at a later annual Kite Carnival on the grounds of the Washington Monument. It is still in the Museum collection.

Within months the Hartigs received offers from manufacturers and outlet stores. But the most enticing one was from The Cloth Company of Nantucket that indicated the owners wanted someone "who could build kites and other toys" to diversify their stock. They were even offered a house rent free in exchange for kites. Never having been there, but sensing a chance that shouldn't miss, they visited the "faraway" island 30 miles south of Cape Cod, Massachusetts with the condition that if they both liked it equally well they would consider putting down permanent roots.

From the moment of stepping off the steamboat they loved everything about it, even if the house was rather small. But they had lived for years in cramped quarters, so that was no problem. The beauty of the picture book town, the serenity of the moors and the hospitality of the locals were welcome changes for the transplanted New Yorkers. (Years later Al would admit to recurring fears of suddenly dying friendless and unclaimed in the big city and his body sent to Hunts Island, the barren speck in New York Harbor where unknowns and paupers were still buried four deep in numbered graves. The move to Nantucket dispelled all that.)

They were also accustomed to being alone with their individual interests. Betty had her literary pursuits, Al had his painting and classical music. So they easily settled into a widely accepted local life style of mingling and exchanging pleasantries on Main Street when there was reason to go into Nantucket town, but otherwise remaining close to home. Except for Betty's mother Suzy they rarely entertained.

The Cloth Company folded soon after their arrival, but the Hartigs were able to acquire the house and incorporate as The Nantucket Kiteman and Lady. They continued advertising in specialty magazines and filling mail orders from home (checks or money orders only). Eventually the official name became Nantucket Kiteman

with its own local Post Office box. Business was brisk but not yet impinging on their other interests. Life was still casual: Al rose at 5 each morning to work on his oils and sculptures and Betty to research and write until about 10, when they turned to serious kite making. Afternoons were spent testing new models on the moors or ferrying to the mainland in search of appropriately printed fabrics (stripes were the most desirable - and hardest to find for forming the kaleidoscopic patterns in his intricate octagonals).

For a short period of time Al made and displayed his kites on the second floor of 41 Main Street. Then one day he got it into his head to open a walk-in kite shop after learning of a vacancy in one of the legendary fishermen's shanties that had lined both water sides of Old South Wharf for more than a century, used mainly for cleaning catch and storing gear from boats docked alongside. Accessed also by a wide crushed-shell footpath down the middle, they were just then (1972) being converted into small arts and crafts galleries as the boatmen moved out. His was squat and raw timbered like the others, with a door onto the walk and windows overlooking the harbor, but it lacked the ubiquitous potbellied stove that kept the others heated for overnight stays in rough weather when muddy or frozen tracks inland proved hazardous for wagon wheels.

With no sense -or interest - in interior decoration, Al haphazardly arranged his stock, resulting in a mad overhead clutter of dangling kites resembling a psychedelic bat cave. A hand-painted sign was nailed up on the shingles outside with NANTUCKET KITEMAN lettered in red beside a white disc showing a silhouetted whale flying a kite from a line tied to its tail. It became his logo.

Though he never gave a coherent reason for needing to "go public", the move definitely affected the couple's cozily insular existence. To protect her privacy, Betty, conservatively dressed anyway, with her long graying hair combed back into a casual knot, seldom appeared on the wharf after the opening. She remained at home and saw to the bookkeeping, mail orders and supervision of the three "Portugee" seamstresses from "Provincetown on the mainland who were now hired to help sew the kites. Only occasionally did she bring lunch down to the shop for the two of them to eat behind the closed door.

Al on the other hand created a brand new persona ("my clown outfit") for days when the shop was open: already tall, lanky and

lantern-jawed, he now sprouted a moustache, donned owlsh dark-rimmed spectacles, beefed up his sideburns, wore a red flannel shirt over khaki pants and polished army shoes, and set a red-banded black derby squarely atop his balding pate - and he became downright garrulous. You couldn't miss him.

On days he allowed the public in, he donned the outfit and flew a bright kite from the door latch high enough to be seen from ferries in the harbor as a signal that the Nantucket Kiteman was open for business. And in surprisingly short order there were pilgrims from all walks of life arriving to worship at the grotto, like the Hawaiian twins who flew in just to get identical kites for an important birthday luau, or the Saudi prince who bought dozens of Valkeries for his favorite pastime of "jeeping" into the desert to watch from under an umbrella as they looped lazily overhead for hours.

That was on the good days. But there were unpredictable - sometimes extended - occasions when Al evinced no interest at all in kite-meistering or the tourists and their eager progeny. The shop door remained closed and bolted from inside. No kite in the sky. No fancy getup. No answering raps. He was there all right, but bare headed and unrecognized in tee-shirt and shorts (and socks with clocks) playing chess and bantering with cronies or quietly ear-phoning classical tapes in solitary oblivion, mind out to sea.

Like a great bear emerging from hibernation he would lumber onto the crushed shells after these sessions, rub his eyes and look around for convenient prey. I was usually it. His shanty was across from mine - a print shop - that was smaller than his but boasted the only tree on that stretch of open wharf with shade and canvas chairs, a cooling respite for neighboring shopkeepers.

Invisible in plain sight, so to speak, he'd lounge back in one of the chairs, cross his feet and continue discourse where he left off at the last encounter. His favorite topic of interest, besides army life, was classical music recordings. His favorite composers were Beethoven and Wagner. His favorite orchestra and conductor were the Berlin Philharmonic and Wilhelm Furtwängler. He would rhapsodize on the pros and cons of competing record labels ad nauseum. At his approach, other shopkeepers under the tree would roll eyes heavenward and remember urgent matters needing immediate attention elsewhere. Or, if they were young and winsome, they would vanish before he was able to plant big wet kisses on their cheeks in "paternal benediction". (He believed he had a way with

women.)

To them he was a dear but boring wind bag, best avoided. I wasn't so lucky. When he discovered I had majored in music in college and still occasionally tinkled on the piano, he sensed a kindred spirit and took it upon himself to further my edification. Not that I strongly objected. It was a harmless way to pass slow-selling afternoons. And his knowledge of Germanic repertoire and its conductor Furtwängler in particular was impressive. To American audiences the conductor was remembered, if at all, as an alleged Nazi sympathizer, the despicable favorite of Hitler and Göring in World War II. Al's take on him was less damning: he was a product of his time and it was not his political associations but his musical genius that mattered to posterity. Also, he noted, he never actually joined the Nazi Party, even though it took until 1946 for him to be cleared of all allegations of collaborating with the National Socialists.

Many summers were spent under the spreading shade, arguing trivial details and playing one-up-man musical memory games. Very few passersby recognized Al as the Nantucket Kiteman. Like Clark Kent, he was only "visible" in mufti. Ours was a fair-weather friendship - the shanties were inner-directed on wet days - but in all that time neither of us felt the need to extend the bonhomie beyond the confines of the wharf. One never even thought to ask in what part of town the other lived.

That all changed when he lumbered over to my tree one sticky August afternoon and asked when I would next be free. I told him two days hence. How would I like to join him in his private cellar music room for some recordings and lunch? Almost knocked off my director's chair, I said sure, but why now? He said it was time I got to know his pad, as he put it. Fine. It was arranged for the day after next. When I learned he lived at 15 Polliwog Pond Road, it was even better.

Polliwog Pond Road turned out to be a charming little U-shaped enclave of small unpretentious cottages on cleared fields, the pond long gone. The entrance to Al and Betty's house was an added-on enclosure, locally called a "wart", that might have originally been a tiny porch. Inside, a crooked path was cleared through heaps of long accumulated sawdust. The window sills and band-saw table were covered with it, as were several pieces of outerwear limp on nails beside the second inner door. Al, with some pride, made a wide one arm gesture encompassing the room as he explained that

it was his major workshop – his baby. Betty was never allowed to clean it. He pointed out some of the hand-turned wooden parts needed for kite assembly, the rotary sanding machines, the wood-splitting bench, the stacks of virgin lumber waiting to be ripped down. The smells were clean, intoxicating, redolent of forests.

The inner door opened onto a narrow kitchen, spic and span utilitarian like a ship's galley. Likely a throwback to their miniature-boat building days. I scraped my shoes on the mat as requested. The aroma of new sawn wood followed us in. Al called out to Betty that we were there. No reply. He called louder. From the large area beyond she said she'd heard him. He invited me to follow him in. The living/dining room spanned the width of the house with any number of bright windows. The dining part was nearest the entrance with perfectly reasonable table and chairs. But in the center of the living area beyond was a diagonally placed pink chaise longue with a quilt tossed over the back. It dominated the open space, even after having seen better days. Reclining on it was Betty in a wrapper, her grey hair loose over her shoulders. On her lap and scattered around her on the floor were sheets of paper, some crumpled. Nearby were piles of large books (that turned out to be dictionaries and encyclopedias). The immediate impression was of Colette, the famed early 20th century French novelist at work in her boudoir.

She looked up and greeted me, but didn't rise from her semi-supine position. I asked if she were writing the Great American Novel. She replied, heavens no, her hobby – avocation really – was creating crossword puzzles. From scratch. An avid, but not always successful puzzle solver myself, I wondered how one actually set out to create them – from scratch. Before I could prod her further, Al said to leave her be and follow him. She waved us away as she crumpled another sheet in disgust and tossed it onto the rug.

He led me back to the kitchen and opened a door I had surmised was a closet. It was instead the way to the cellar. He flipped a wall switch and went down the stairs first, admonishing me to hold onto the railing because it was steep going. The room was semi-dark and smelled more of dank cement than pine forests. But as my eyes grew accustomed I was astonished to behold a row of very pretty, very feminine light sconces with fringed red silk shades along three walls like in old-time movie theaters. The pink bulbs inside cast an eerie sickly-sweet glow. The fourth wall was

cordoned off by an opaque mesh curtain from end to end.

Al beckoned me to the center where a platform rose. On it, throne-like, sat a stuffed maroon velour chair with a high ornately carved backboard, padded arms and gilded lion head hand rests. It faced the mesh curtain. Next to it, lower on the right, was a much smaller plain side chair, facing the same way. On the other side of the throne was a complex command center of knobs, switches, levers and tiny blinking red and green lights ready for action.

He indicated that I should sit in the plain side chair, brought down because he usually held these sessions alone. Betty did not attend any of them, but could hear the music through the floorboards. Then he settled himself onto the throne and fiddled with the knobs and levers. The room slowly darkened until all the pink wall lights were out and it was pitch black. I could hear him breathing, but nothing else. Total silence. As my eyes got accustomed to the dark, a faint reddish glow appeared all around the base of the walls. It grew stronger and redder, until it became clear that it was back-lighting a series of black silhouettes, each more than a foot high, each showing two figures in a highly stylized, very basic (and exaggerated) sex position. They turned out to be simplified cutout illustrations from the *Kama Sutra*, fashioned from eyebeams by our mutual friend, the sculptor Bud Hambledon. Though there were 64 actual variations described in the *Kama Sutra*, I believe there were less than half that screwing about the periphery of Al's cellar. Disturbing and alluring at the same time in their intense blackness against the ever increasing fiery glow, they were so seemingly out of place as to be laughably incongruous with the morning's intent of listening to classical music recordings.

Another moment and my olfactory senses were introduced to a faint flowery essence I could only describe as dime-store perfume. It began to permeate the dank air. What was going on here? I asked in total bewilderment. Al cleared his throat and told the tale:

When he was first drafted into the army in World War II, he went into basic training in a camp in Louisiana. It was horrible: hot as hell, rained all the time, nothing to do on a night off but go with the flow to New Orleans to stave off total boredom. Most nights he ended up in just one bar, got soused and took the company bus back to camp. His buddies regaled each other about their sexual escapades (real or un-) on the way. But he had no stories to tell. The truth was he had never had sex of any kind, ever, and was too

afraid to admit it – or have it.

One night, back to New Orleans and on his own, he got up enough courage to stop in a bar near Bourbon Street with a bordello upstairs he'd heard about. He went in, "shivering from fright in 90 degree heat", braced himself with a few drinks, and before long found himself a winsome partner who linked arms and led him to the brothel – an upstairs room in a downtrodden quarter. Due to anxiety at the moment and the fact that everything was happening so quickly, his memory of her was only a blur. But he never forgot the room where he lost his virginity. He recalled it in exquisite detail: the little pink bulbs under red fringed shades; the vaguely perfumed air; the pornographic black silhouettes in cracked frames on the walls. Above all he remembered the glowing post-coital sense of achievement and relief, a coming of age. He kept the image of that room in his mind all through the South Pacific and back, and when he finally had a house of his own in Nantucket, he requisitioned the cellar space for his "bordello encantado" (enchanted brothel).

So saying, the baseboard lights were dimmed from the throne-side console to a faint roseate smudge low on the walls. The air lost its perfumed aroma, (the essence had been heated up by the bulbs), and a touch on a lever caused the mesh curtains to part and slide noiselessly out of the way. There, revealed in the half light was a state-of-the-art stereo system filling the entire wall we faced, with huge speakers at each end and all kinds of blinking gadgetry in between. Was this Radio City Music Hall, or what?

Signaling the serious part of the program was about to begin, Al solemnly introduced the classical piece we were to hear first: Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, in a remarkable 1951 recording made at the re-opening of the Bayreuth Festival, with Wilhelm Furtwängler conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. As indicated earlier, Furtwängler was a controversial figure in the Music World because of his alleged ties with Hitler in World War II and this was one of his first major assignments after his being cleared of collaborating with the Nazis in 1946. He subsequently had toured with the orchestra to South America, Switzerland, Italy, Paris and London. He had not conducted in the United States since the mid-1930s, when he was offered the opportunity of succeeding Arturo Toscanini as music director of the New York Philharmonic and declined. His own declining years were all spent in Germany. He

He died in 1954 at age 68.

However we had never sat down together and listened to the music. So this, in itself was going to be a treat for me. I tried to pretend I was comfortable on the hard lackey seat with no arms. I crossed mine, sat up straight and closed my eyes in anticipation. A flick of another switch and the room went black, just as the opening chords of the first movement issued forth. They grew louder and swelled until our heads were filled with the familiar sounds that, in this setting, seemed entirely new and surprisingly intimate. I forgot about counting the aching bones in my back and let myself be carried away with the sheer impact. The darkness engulfed me like a warm blanket.

As the finale chorale of the last movement began, Al increased the volume. The impact was as if the entire Mormon Tabernacle Choir (not on the recording) was in my lap. After the last ringing chords ended, there was a firm tapping on the floor above. Betty had heard the music, of course – as most of the inhabitants of Polliwog Pond Road probably had – and it was her way of signaling to Al that lunch was ready. I was slightly taken aback. I had forgotten I was to stay for lunch. Did that mean there would be several more hours of music afterward? I stood up to ease my sore butt, and heard Al, a bark in the dark, tell me to sit down. Without turning on any lights he felt his way to the stairs, climbed up to the door, unlatched and pushed open a smaller trap door in the lower half of it, and retrieved a tray placed on the kitchen floor. On it were two egg salad sandwiches, each wrapped in a damp linen napkin, two iced teas and two brownies. He brought down the tray and told me to hold it while he went back up and shut the trap door. Betty was out of sight.

Returning, he reclaimed his throne, took the tray from my hands and doled out my portion, expecting me, I guessed, to eat off my lap. He unwrapped and one-handedly chewed his sandwich while fiddling over the console with the other. I balanced my tea precariously on a lion's head. Indicating there was no sense wasting the mood, he sailed right into the next number, a famous one, of Furtwängler conducting Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. We sat munching egg as the prelude of the opera began to soar. That particular recording was one of Al's all-time favorites, recorded in mono in July 1952, with the Philharmonia Orchestra and the chorus of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London. *Isolde* was sung by

one of the great sopranos of the century, Kirsten Flagstad (who had also been a favorite of Hitler's, but that was another story). She was 57 at the time, yet still in amazing voice, even if, in Act 2, a couple highs had to be rendered by another slightly younger but equally well known soprano, Elizabeth Schwarzkopf.

Al mentioned during the prelude that the *Tristan* on that disc was Ludwig Suthaus, who by all accounts was not up to par with the divas, but tolerated because of the superior effort of Flagstad. Also, he continued, because of the rhapsodic singing of a new young baritone, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in the minor role of *Kurwend*. By the time actual singing began in the first act we were well into our brownies and draining the last of the tea. Much as I loved that opera, the thought of sitting on a rock hard chair another three hours was daunting, but, I had to admit, challenging. (I was having one of the most unique experiences of my life!)

Al was so immersed in the music he would alternately sing a-long enraptured or roar and thump a lion head in disgust. Whatever his momentary whim, I was totally neglected – a non-entity. Frankly, as the hours passed and the repast caused blood cells to rush to aid digestion, I grew increasingly sluggish. My head fell to my chest so often I eventually left it there. I actually dozed through a greater part of Act 2, missing the Schwarzkopf inserts. But nearing the end of Act 3, where *Tristan* is dead and *Isolde* laments it and her own impending demise in the *Liebestod* (Love Death), I was wide awake and simply blown away, as ever, by the long, sad legato outpouring, one of the most moving scenes in all opera. I thought back to my first year at college when my roommate and I would turn off all the lights in the dorm and lie face up on the floor, hands behind our heads, with eyes closed reverently, hardly breathing for fear of missing the slightest nuance.

My eyes were still closed when Al flipped a switch that faintly lit up the gloom. He touched my thigh (which was numb by then) and asked if I minded slipping away without further ado. I understood, quietly thanked him, and made my way back up to the kitchen and out through the sawdust.

Hitting the late afternoon air was like debarking from a ship after a long voyage of discovery. It took time to adjust to being on Firm land again.. Or maybe like after a surrogate sexual encounter.

We didn't see much of each other after that. He appeared less and less under my wharf tree, and I had seldom ever seen him in town anyway. By the end of the season of our "bordello encantado" I closed shop and had to leave the island early without the usual goodbyes. The next spring when I returned and looked across to where his kite shop had been, and saw it occupied by another craft-person with a jazzy lacquered sign, I felt sad but not bereft. I figured we'd meet sometime and talk over old experiences. But we never did. On Labor Day in the fall of 1990, feeling grey and a little overcast, like the weather, I rode my bicycle out to the dunes and sat staring mindlessly at the leaden sea. Suddenly, far down the strand, rose a bright splash of color that startled me back to reality. It was a bank of six identically shaped kites on the same frame: red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet. They swooped and danced in tandem about the sky for half an hour or more, before gently dropping out of sight behind a distant dune. I had a distinct awareness of Al Hartig, and didn't know why, but it gave me a strange feeling of remorse – and loss – for not having kept in touch. On second thought later it seemed a kind of omen.

It was little surprise, then, when opening up the local newspaper several days later, to see on the obituary page a large black and white photo of him in his shop as I remembered it.

Al Hartig, known as The Nantucket Kiteman died at his home on Polliwog Pond Road, Monday, September 3, 1990, after several months of declining health. He was 68....



It should have added that only Nantucket Kiteman lived on as before, in all the ways that made him beloved of untold numbers of children and their parents, of Hawaiian twins, of Arabian princes and Washington nabobs. Even me. On one of those early days when he slumped over to my canvas chair, he had under his arm a most elegant new octagonal kite with perfectly aligned kaleidoscopic patterns only Betty could have sewn. He presented it to me with a clumsy flourish and a tweak on an ear, and signed it:

"Here's looking at you, Donn, baby"

You betcha, Al!



MOSCOW MEMORIES

Red Square was the central heartbeat of Moscow. In its vast brick expanse lay a dozen or more highly treasured Russian architectural wonders of historic significance – a few of questionable renown. A scan around its perimeter would lead a first time visitor – me in May, 1987 – to wonder if a tongue-in-cheek early precursor of Walt Disney was at work there.

Some of the most colorful edifices, like St. Basil Cathedral to the east with eight funky psychedelic onion domes and the red and white checkered tablecloth of a State History Museum with its excessive jumble of towers anchoring the northwest center of the Square, were definitely knock-offs of Walt's Orlando fantasies. Or was it vice versa?

In any event, what Red Square and Disney World had in common were huge numbers of tourists from all over the globe, all the time. What they didn't have in common was a Communist regime that was on the verge of collapse (General Secretary of the Communist Party – read "Dictator" – Mikhail Gorbachev would announce his resignation that very month and the Soviet Union would cease to exist in 1991). For the time being, however, strict controls were still enforced. No foreigners, at least no Americans, were allowed into the country to travel at will. They had to join a tour group chosen by Immigration along with two guides – one Russian speaking, the other, in our case, English speaking. No picture taking was allowed of bridges, municipal buildings, railway stations or trains, airports or planes, or of government officials traveling in limos with pennants. If caught with pornography of any kind, it meant confiscation, a fine, or jail time. In my case, I'd bought a paperback edition of Jane Eyre's *Pride and Prejudice* in Helsinki airport because it was the only thing readable for the

flight to Moscow, and when I was going through Russian customs, the inspector picked it up, turned it over, and read the blurb on the back that was designed to push the book. It contained a number of lurid descriptions like lust, depravity, incest, etc., and he threw it on a bench behind him with a disgusted “Nyet!” Poor Jane Eyre, she had no idea... At least I didn’t get incarcerated. He banged my luggage closed and waved me on.

Our tour group consisted of a dozen Americans, all first timers, and the ubiquitous guides and driver. We were instructed to stay together with a guide at all times, and not wander off on our own without permission, under penalty of god-knew-what. Circling around Red Square on foot to get a feel of the surroundings we encountered numbers of school age boys (never wondering why they were not in school) who followed us about asking in English for ‘*cleekpens*’. We had been encouraged by our New York travel office to carry lots of retractable pens with us to distribute all over Russia. It was forbidden to offer them money – theirs or ours – and forbidden for them to pay for them. So instead they would open their jackets and offer us a choice of glittering pins lining the insides. It resulted in quite a colorful barter with them happily clicking among themselves to see whose was the loudest, and us counting the stash of medals bulging our pockets at day’s end.

On the bus was a dentist, his wife and daughter. The daughter accompanied the party as expected. But on some days the older couple would disappear after lunch, or not show up at all. The daughter told the guides that they were not feeling well, but then finally revealed to the rest of us that they had made earlier arrangements from the States with certain underground Jewish organizations to secretly meet with designated contacts to deliver illegal papers – sometimes out in the suburbs of the city. An incensed fellow passenger asked if she and her parents had thought what might happen to the rest of us if they were caught. Didn’t they realize we could all have been considered suspicious and apprehended, or worse? The young lady began to cry and said she’d begged them not to do it. It was too dangerous. But they were adamant, saying it was their duty to help the repressed Russian Jewish community. The rest of us became adamant at that point too, and told her they must stop it immediately for all our sakes or leave the tour. The reluctant couple rejoined us the next day without a word, as if nothing untoward had happened, the dentist, in fact, becoming

the most popular member on board. Instead of cleekpens he handed out tooth brushes to the street kids, some of whom didn't seem to know what they were for. The rest of us wondered aloud if he might still be making contacts at night from the hotel where we stayed. Luckily we never found out.

The Metropol Hotel, just around the corner from Red Square, was at once fabulous and cheesy. It, like all the structures in the vicinity, was a brainchild of Josef Stalin, the dictator without peer. He wanted the world to see how advanced his country was, and did it by erecting showplaces like that to prove it. If travelers were allowed to visit the suburbs of Moscow or beyond, they would find how mundane – and grey – the communities were. But the Metropol façade was an art nouveau masterpiece of sorts made of sculpted stone and multicolored mosaics. The interiors were equally sumptuous, but, in typical Russian fashion, highly overdone to the point of being vulgar. It attracted the royalties of Europe and Hollywood as well as well-heeled business titans of the world. Smoking was allowed everywhere and head shots of the rich and famous graced the hallways. Our quarters were, to use a naval term, below decks: small bathroom, no air conditioning, adequate but cramped.

Adequate but tasteless was the cabaret show at the glass enclosed rooftop night club. To loud ersatz rock music the slightly chunky dancers, all bottle blondes, gave wan imitations of the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes, kicking up legs encased in what resembled wrinkle-kneed long johns instead of sheer tights. Decolletage seemed to be allowed only if held up by flesh colored bibs tied around the neck with sequin chokers. The show-stopping finale included a contortionist who wound up turning her self into a perfect pretzel. Carried aloft around the room and then out by a mustached attendant, her beige “tights”, stretched to their limit, didn't go all the way up, leaving new moons of pink skin between them and the rim of the spangled costume covering her derriere.

Patron dancing followed the show with a different, swinging combo. It was the time my fellow traveler Arthur and I dreaded. There were two youngish, very personable women from Brooklyn in our group with nice looking faces, necks and arms, but grotesquely enlarged hips and buttocks (we never saw their legs which were always covered by floor length skirts). They were very open about discussing their condition, even to acknowledging a

healthy sex life. It seemed they never wanted for partners, some of whom admittedly had rather kinky tastes. On the bus each fully occupied a seat across. Aisles and doorways were problematic but they took them in stride with self-deprecating good humor. They were almost always ushered in first everywhere.

By travel protocol we were duty bound to ask them to dance at least once, hoping they would decline. But instead they appeared delighted and gathered their grossness onto the dance floor. Well heeled – and oiled – Muscovites at the surrounding tables snickered and sneered, but the young women paid them no heed. Neither did we. To the surprise of everyone they were remarkably graceful dancers, even if we had to hold them at full arms' length and pretend they were wearing hoop skirts from *Gone With the Wind*. By the end of the slow rumba, some of the cynics even applauded softly. It reminded me of the time when my mother took my little brother and me to the Brockton Fair to see the Paul Whiteman Band. One of the acts was The Rosebuds, six famously fat damsels in pink tulle and toe shoes who initially drew jeers from the grandstand until they began to dance. The jeers turned to cheers as their grace and virtuosity enthralled the popcorn crowd, and they returned for repeated bows. Our maitre d' at the Metro-pol, all smiles and flourish, brought complimentary flutes of Russian vodka to our table. We laughed as we toasted, wondering if the other patrons thought we were part of the act.

Back in Red Square, on almost the entire northwest side was GUM (pronounced *goom*), Russia's most touted department store-or joke. Its two levels displayed everything imaginable that no average Russian could afford. Another Stalin smokescreen to impress the rest of the world, it had to be the least busy store in the world. Shoppers, even tourists, were few and far between, and bored sales girls gathered in little gossip groups or stood behind counters doing their nails. It was said that Stalin and his generals took over the entire building during World War II for central headquarters, with some special troops bivouacked in back rooms. In spring of 1987 a series of small boutiques and souvenir stands was being installed on the first level. We found the place, even with its glass paneled roof, depressingly somber, and spent the least amount of time.

At the far end of the Square (actually a long rectangle) was the structure that had become the defining emblem of the area, and, maybe, of all Russia: the *Krasnaya Ploshchad*, otherwise known as

the Cathedral of St. Basil the Blessed. Its extravagant onion domes, eight in all, rose like garish upside down children's tops spinning in wanton spirals and zigzags in the sky around a tapered red brick tower that seemed all pock marks and warts. Commissioned by, of course, Ivan the Terrible, and built starting in 1555, its architect, Poshnik Yakovlev, was punished, as the story went, for creating what the Tsar considered the most beautiful church in the world. Ivan ordered him blinded so he could never again create anything to rival its splendor. (The fact was, in spite of his ocular affliction, history recorded that the architect actually did design another spectacular cathedral later in Vladimir).

As mentioned earlier, the first sight of St. Basil's resembled a familiar fantasy out of Walt Disney, be it the prototype of a fairyl-land castle or an Arabian Nights palace. Close up in Red Square it appeared just as unreal and two-dimensional as a movie prop. So much so that I had to step inside to prove it wasn't merely for show. And there the fantasy ended. All Yakovlev's creative juices must have been expended on the exterior, because inside was disappointingly modest to say the least – dreary might have been a better description. The church comprised nine small poorly lit chapels connected by a maze of dim corridors, with barely visible wall decorations dating from the 17th century. No chapel was large enough to accommodate huge holiday crowds, so the faithful had to resort to worshiping at an outdoor altar in full view of the onion domes. How fortunate for them. I couldn't wait to return outside and gaze up again at their bold, smile-inducing exuberance.

The cathedral withstood a number of historical attempts at destruction. Napoleon, for example, was said to have been so impressed that he wanted to take it back to Paris with him. Lacking the technical know-how to do so, he, being Napoleon, ordered it blown up as his army retreated. The French laid out powder kegs and lit their fuses, just as a tremendous rain shower – an act of the Almighty? – occurred, extinguishing them before they could explode. Early in the 20th century it came under attack again from the then political regime. In 1918 Bolshevik authorities fatally shot the senior priest, confiscated the property, melted down the bells and closed the cathedral. One Comrade Kaganovich, a close buddy of Stalin and director of the Red Square plan, urged him to knock it down to ease the way for parade and vehicular movement on the square. Luckily for posterity, Stalin rejected that pro-

posals, as he did a later one, when confronted by a subsequent director devoted to Russian culture, P. Baranovsky, who, when ordered to tear it down, refused by threatening to slit his own throat on the threshold of the main altar. He sent a blunt telegram to the dictator saying so, and got no immediate reply. Soon after, for reasons unknown Stalin cancelled that directive, but Comrade Baranovsky got five years in prison in reply.

Rounding out a tour of Red Square, we came to the most dreadfully impressive architectural feature of all that dominated the entire southwest edge – the Kremlin Wall. Behind its forbidding red brick height lay the Kremlin itself, a small exclusive town of its own. Only the churches and a few government offices were open to the public at any one time, even though it contained a number of official residences and bureaucratic offices that made up the seat of Russian government. The oldest architectural ensemble in the world, it contained, besides the above, presidential offices, a memory room, diamond exhibits, a concert hall and the historic Tsar's bell (1733) and cannon dating from 1586. Our group went nowhere near that feared enclave, but did stroll down the outer Memorial Wall past tombs of former Bolshevik heroes and one American, John Reed.

Reed, born in 1887, was a Harvard trained journalist who covered many important world events, including the Mexican revolution, and when World War I broke out became a war correspondent in Europe. While visiting Russia, he became a close friend of Lenin and witnessed the Bolshevik seizure of power in Leningrad (then Petrograd), writing the renowned best seller account, *Ten Days That Shook the World* in 1919. On return to the U.S. he joined the Communist Labor Party and was indicted with others for sedition. He escaped back to the Soviet Union, where he died an early death of typhus in 1920, and was buried alongside Lenin's Bolshevik comrades. Initially reviled in America, he eventually became a hero in radical intellectual circles. His plaque on the Kremlin Wall became a must-read pause for American tourists.

Just down a ways from there was the next place that every person going to Moscow wanted to see – the tomb of Lenin. Erected on a site for centuries known as *Lobnoye Mesto*, the place for executions in medieval times, it stood slightly in front of the wall, a simple unadorned box-like construction of brick and red marble with no windows and only two doors – one in and one out. Inside

lay the embalmed body of the man considered the foremost revolutionary figure of 20th century Europe.

Vladimir Ilich Lenin (born Ulyanov), son of a government official, was born in 1870, a rebel from birth. As a teenager he was witness to the hanging of his older brother for plotting to assassinate Tsar Alexander III. He was then expelled from the University of Kagan in his first year as a radical troublemaker, and exiled to his grandfather's country estate, where he began studying the works of Karl Marx, including *Das Kapital*. He declared himself a Marxist. Eventually granted permission to return to university, he passed his law exam in 1891 and was an advocate for the poor until he left in 1893 for Petrograd (later Leningrad). There he joined a Marxist group and helped create a union for the emancipation of the working class. They were all arrested and Lenin spent 15 months in jail, where he met his future wife, Nadezhda Kupskaya. He was exiled again, this time to Siberia until 1900, after which he went abroad and helped found a radical newspaper *Iskra* (Spark) and wrote his masterpiece *What is to Be Done?* in 1902.

Meanwhile his Social Democratic party back in Petrograd split apart. Lenin's faction gained a small majority in congress (hence the term *Bolshevik*, meaning majority; the others became known as *Mensheviks*, meaning minority). Lenin secretly returned to Petrograd by sealed railway car to announce it. From then until the onset of World War I the two factions quarreled and alienated each other. Lenin exiled himself again to Europe until 1917, when he returned triumphantly to Russia to lead the revolution that overthrew the Tzarist regime. Among other steps, he banned factionalism and introduced one party rule – the birth of the Communist Soviet Union.

In May 1922 Lenin experienced the first of three strokes that would finally incapacitate him fully. He was by then a revered – maybe worshiped – figure, and when he died at 54 in 1924, he was the Soviet equivalent of a saint. It took several months to complete the embalming process of his remains after it was decided to place his body on permanent public view. An electric pump had to be installed to maintain humidity inside the cavity. Experts from France (Madame Toussaud?) were brought in to remake his face, which was in terrible shape when he expired.

By the year we got to visit his tomb, which was an unprepossessing square building, one story high with an unmarked ent-

ranceway, he had been “mummified” for so long that there were rumors about the condition of his remains: some argued that almost everything except the face and hands had been replaced; others claimed it was an effigy and nothing at all remained of the original; others said the remains had been replaced by another embalmed body of similar build, probably several times over (he was relatively short in spite of early posters showing him the stature of Abraham Lincoln, and stocky , bald headed with a pointy reddish beard, and pince nez spectacles)

We began our pilgrimage very early on a misty glum morning – just the weather for a ghoulish encounter – at the back of a double line that snaked well around the southwest end of the Kremlin Wall on the broad boulevard called *Manezhnaya Ploshchad*. (street names were a special challenge in the USSR). We had been warned ahead of time by our guides that this was to be a most solemn occasion. When we approached the entrance we must go silently two by two, no stopping, hands out of pockets, no chewing gum, no cigarettes, no bags or cameras and heads bowed respectfully unsmiling. Noncompliance could mean passport confiscation, imprisonment, a fine, or all (or worse!). It was almost noon before we reached the golden gate. We were as glum as the weather, hungry from no breakfast, and wondering how we got ourselves in this macabre mess at all.

As we neared the walk leading into the tomb, national guards were at attention along either side in olive uniforms with red epaulettes and bands around their hats. Two severe looking sergeants lined us up again in twos by height and sex, admonishing with white gloved fingers to the lips to remain silent. I was paired with a young recent college graduate who was accompanying his grandmother and with our group. She had told us on the bus that she asked him what he wanted for a graduation present and he said a trip to Europe and Russia with her. She was slightly overwhelmed and was trying very hard to keep up. He was a stalwart lad about 6 feet tall with the undeniable long lean face of Back Bay breeding, and an already jaundiced wit. His grandmother was placed back in the pack with another lady from our bus her height. The two pear-shaped damsels were ahead of us, prompting him to wonder if we might be heading into Noah’s Ark with them as hippos and we as giraffes. I couldn’t see Arthur. He must have been back with the goats and gazelles.

Finally we were at the doorway and being counted. Only 12 beasties were allowed in at one time. Given a moment to adjust to the pitch black interior, each pair was then escorted by a stiff guard up a ramp along the right wall. It made a left turn, went across the back of the chamber, then turned left again down the opposite side to the exit, forming a squared U. We got to view the body from all three sides as we passed: right side, then feet first, then the left. It rested atop a raked catafalque draped in black velvet on a black stone floor. The only light was one dramatic pin spot directly above Lenin's head. Armed guards covered each turn. There was soft funereal music playing somewhere. I thought I recognized Tchaikovsky. The procession was slow enough so we could get the full frontal as we crossed the back wall. It was in a black suit, white shirt, black tie and black shoes (in mourning for itself?). The pasty face below the billiard ball head was as noncommittal and creepily lifelike as any wax museum denizen. The reddish beard was malevolently pointed. The hands were clasped over the waist. It was those hands that got me: they still had prominent purplish veins and blue fingertips, like those of someone who had signed a lot of death warrants. I felt certain they were real, if nothing else was. So that was the (in)famous Kremlin Gremlin. I suddenly remembered that the embalmed remains of Joseph Stalin, Lenin's successor, were displayed beside him in full regalia for almost a decade as well, beginning in 1953, before being interred somewhere out of town. Too bad we missed it. It would have been an enchanting double bill, I thought in passing, with the Kremlin Gremlin and the Moscow Menace as unlikely lie-ins for Sleeping Beauty. – right out of the Brothers Grimm.

Just then the Boston Brahmin leaned over with a hand cupped over his mouth and whispered "Who do you suppose stands on Lenin to change the light bulb?" That was all we needed. All the phony sanctimonious crap – the freakish sideshow, mawkish music, sniffing peasants in babushkas (probably paid by the sniffle), and glaring guards – had contrived to send the both of us first into repressed giggles, then uncontrollable outbursts of laughter. I was doubled over the rail, he leaning against me. We couldn't stop. Our guard and one behind grabbed hold of each of our shoulders and literally dragged us forward past the other astonished "mourners" and out the exit. No words were spoken. They threw us against the Kremlin Wall, then returned inside, quietly shutting the door, never

missing a beat. That was it. Like a silent movie. No confiscated passports, no fines, no life sentences, no death threats, no nothing. Bruised, shaken and scared, we picked ourselves up, dusted ourselves off and made our way back to the Square to await our companions, half-heartedly joking that they had certainly knocked the – what was Russian for ‘shit’? – out of us.

Coming from behind Lenin’s Tomb, we were spotted by the ubiquitous ‘*cleekpen*’ traders (didn’t they ever go to school?) who, pointing at me, began shouting “Len-eeen, Len-eeen!” I admitted a slight resemblance to him, with bald pate and pointy beard, but wasn’t all that eager to acknowledge it, for fear of perpetrating another myth – the miraculous resurrection of a long dead dictator from his own mausoleum. I waved them off with a few pens and my sepulchral friend and I rejoined our party near where singing evangelists formed another surreal aspect of the morning. Singing evangelists? Yes. A troupe of American Southern Baptists had set up a card table in the Square and were proselytizing, singing hymns and distributing pamphlets about attaining redemption, all in English. They were mostly ignored by passersby, but bravely persevering. I vaguely wondered if they had permits.

Our fellow travelers found us and huddled around asking questions. It had been so dark in the tomb that just the ones directly behind us in line saw anything. The rest heard only a muffled commotion. The consensus was, after learning of our flagrant flaunting of the rules, that we were lucky to get away with only a bit of roughing up. Was it over? We hoped so, but kept furtively looking back over our shoulders all the same. The group was about to turn away from the Kremlin to return to our hotel when, lo and behold, another diversion was spotted at the opposite end of the Square directly in front of St. Basil’s. A sizable crowd of Muscovites had gathered, shouting and gesturing wildly. Our Russian-speaking guide went over to check it out and returned to tell us a small plane had illegally landed there – a historic first, and we, of course, off paying respects to Bolsheviks we didn’t respect, missed it. From what she gathered and we read later, the story was:

That morning, May 28, 1987, a 19 year old German named Matthias Rust had circled around overhead in a small Cessna plane and landed smack down in front of the onion domes. It seemed he was a passionate new pilot out for a morning spin over Hamburg and wandered far off course. He had no idea where he was and

landed in the largest (strictly prohibited) open space he could find, apparently unaware it was Red Square. So where was border patrol security? It was not divulged. But it was found that many of the state air controllers were attending an annual picnic far from their appointed duties, leaving airport towers undermanned. Young Rust was nowhere in sight, having been quickly whisked away by embarrassed, angry authorities in a cover-up attempt. Only 4 years earlier a Korean Airlines passenger jet was shot down over Moscow to worldwide ridicule, so this new incident, when discovered, proved so embarrassing for Mikhail Gorbachev that he immediately fired his defense and air ministers and more than 2000 officers. The lad spent 432 days in jail for his brazen recklessness and then was sent packing back to *mutter* in Germany, with no further punishment. The world wasn't crazy about that either. (Gorbachev's retort, in effect: 'You criticize us for shooting down a plane, and then you criticize us for not shooting down a plane. Ech?')

We were not allowed to go near the aircraft, of course, but the stroll over and back netted one last handful of souvenir pins from the '*cleekpen*' kids. I had plenty by then and was becoming increasingly wary of the shouted Lenin look-alike references accompanying each barter. My tomb-mate and I had attracted enough attention as it was, and the local constabulary continued eyeing us narrowly in passing. Still shaken – and shaking – we glanced over our shoulders frequently on our walk downtown to the Metropol for a welcomed protracted lunch and time to lick our wounds.

ONE NEAR TOO FAR THE OTHER FAR TOO NEAR

Two other memorable events were in store before leaving Moscow. The first was a very much anticipated performance of the Bolshoi Ballet at the legendary Bolshoi Theatre. We had experienced the Ballet at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City when it was on tour, but never at its home site. The Bolshoi Theatre's main entrance was magnificently impressive: set in an open square, its eight massive granite columns led the eye up to a rooftop bronze sculpture group of a chariot with charioteer reigning in four larger than life rearing horses, poised to seemingly pounce down upon the viewer. It reminded me of a similar effect atop the cathedral in Piazza San Marco in Venice. The program that night was a full length version of *Swan Lake* with the current premier

danseurs of the company, whose names were unpronounceable but generally ended in --ovna and --inski.

Excitement was running high. The guide got us there in plenty of time to find our front row seats. The problem was the seats happened to be on the top (5th) tier, what we called the peanut gallery in New York. No elevators were available so we climbed stairs, stopped to catch breath and climbed more stairs, then more and more until we were dizzy from the heights and rarified air. In cramped narrow plush seats, the only way to view the stage was by hanging half over the guard rail.

The heat was suffocating. And when the ballet began, the dancers were so far away they looked like fleas, at least when they danced close enough to the front of the stage to be seen at all. Otherwise they were lost behind the lavish protruding proscenium arch. And then there was the enormous crystal chandelier dangling from the center of the ceiling to contend with. It was directly at our eye level. When it was lit, the dazzling refractions were blinding; when turned off, they formed an inverted pyramid that cut a solid black wedge into the center of the performing area, dividing it in half with the point in the orchestra pit. Since the bulk of the ballet's pas de deux were danced within that wedge, the most one could hope for was a quick glimpse of the outer curve of one of the four cygnets' tutus as they galloped right to left. What a bummer. I gave up after the first scene and spent the rest of the time tracing the gilded whorls intertwining along the top borders of the hall and craning to "read" the painted tableaux across the ceiling.

There were no side balconies or boxes to ogle. So the only thing left was the music. The orchestra was very good by ballet company standards that too often relied predominantly on pick-up players, and who would quibble with the divine Tchaikovsky? The king (or queen, depending on who you read) of inspired schmaltz, he was born to compose for ballet. Every stroke of his pen was a danceable gesture. Looking around at the walls of our tier that were sumptuous gold and red, they reminded me of those at the old Paris Opera, and I thought that if all the lower tiers of the Bolshoi were as richly ornate, then the structure was a fitting tribute to the arts indeed. (It was also used for opera performances).

Unfortunately, for me as well as the rest of our group, the heat had grown palpable, and the decision was made to leave quietly during Act. 2, just after the Black Swan pas des deux, something I

had never done at a ballet performance before (or since). Tiptoeing as quietly as 20 pairs of feet descending those ill-lit stairs could, and then stumbling out into the chill autumn night was like attaining nirvana.

There was never anything like the Moscow Circus (Moskovski Tsirk) in any of its incarnations, and there were many. Earlier known as the Salamonsky, later as the Nikulin, then Moscow State Circus of the Order of Lenin, and one or two others before its current title, it was always referred to as 'The Circus on Tsvetnoy Boulevard'. In 1987 it remained supreme, but its new house was under construction on the same site, so the performance we attended took place in temporary quarters next door, but the variety and quality were consistent. Russia was full of little circus companies, and the best acts of each aspired to play the one on Tsvetnoy Boulevard, a bit like vaudeville acts at the Palace Theater in old New York.

The night we attended was far different from that at the Bolshoi. We held front row tickets, but really up front, right at ringside (only one ring, less than 40 feet in diameter, small by American standards of three large ones at double the diameter). It was almost too near. A voice announced that all in the front rows must place hands in laps, make no sudden gestures, not speak or applaud, and be perfectly still. No sooner had we absorbed that than a whole platoon of big brown bears burst in, walked single file on hind legs along the inside perimeter, and then began to perform – some dancing, some juggling with their feet or leapfrogging to sprightly music from a band on a balcony. One approached me beating its chest like the proverbial King Kong. Its breath from three feet away was revolting. I was scared, but even more so because there were no human handlers visible. None. A cub sat down back-to on the edge of the ring in front of the young girl beside me, and turned to stare at her with button eyes. She quivered with fright. Then, at a silent signal, they lumbered away on all fours. It wasn't until their handlers appeared center ring alone that we dared to clap – or breathe. The following tiger act seemed downright tame.

Numerous others followed, some familiar, some amazing. The clowns were generally awful. But one act stood out in memory

long after that evening. Two hefty beige cows were led out, positioned, and then tossed beach balls back and forth with their noses, udders swaying gently to country music. The next act was as fearsome as that was bucolic. Six Cossacks raced their horses around at breakneck pace, perspiration flicking in our faces, the thundering hooves becoming blurs. A large hoop made of inward-pointing sabers was lowered and a Don slipped under his horse, riding upside down. The horse circled, then leapt up through the hoop with inches to spare all around, beast and rider emerging unscathed. The finale was a beautiful aerial ballet based on folklore about fallen soldiers in battle who are transformed into flying cranes, with 10 graceful acrobats (one a woman) in white leotards who seemed to float higher and lighter from trapeze to trapeze, performing quadruple flips and catches, then swooping down and bouncing back even higher, the net a canopy of low clouds. Awe struck and inspired, we soared too. It was Russian artistry at its most sublime.

Notes made 1988

Edited and written September, 2009, NYC



MURDER ON THE 6: 15

Thursday February 23, 1922

The early evening commuter run from Boston arrived on schedule an hour later at the Clicquot Depot in Millis on its way southwest. It was already growing dark. Amid patches of melting snow on the station platform a solitary figure waited impatiently under the overhead lights, hands in the pockets of a turned up overcoat. When the train's door swung open he bounded up the steps to the vestibule between coaches before anyone had a chance to start down.

A strongly built young man, he easily elbowed past others lined up for departure behind the door and raced along the aisle, searching both sides for two particular faces. They were there, up ahead at mid-coach in their usual seats: a middle-aged man on the outside and a young woman beside him at the window. They had already donned their outer coats to get off at the next stop. Their heads were turned toward each other in conversation. Neither saw him coming.

The stalker paused long enough to draw a pistol from his pocket. Without a word he lunged toward the gentleman and shot him point blank in the chest. The older man died instantly, his body slumped half out of the seat. Recognizing the killer, the panic-stricken young woman leaped over the body in an attempt to escape out the back door, but as she did the killer fired again, sending a bullet into her left shoulder. She grasped her arm and fled screaming from the train to the station platform. He followed, oblivious to the turmoil he was causing among the startled passengers. He threw her down in the snow and pummeled her unmercifully. Then not content, or crazed by his murderous frenzy, he stood and aimed the gun at her head.

She instinctively lifted the wounded arm up over her face just as he fired three more times. The gesture saved her life. The bullets lodged in that arm. The assailant looked around as if wondering

what to do next and saw two black silhouettes advancing from the darkness alongside the train with what looked like weapons. Probably assuming they were police, he pointed the gun at his own chest and pulled the trigger. Not yet dead, he fell again on the young woman and continued pounding.

Locomotive Fireman J. B. Barry reached them first and crashed a heavy firebox poker over the killer's head. Stunned, he rolled off her and tumbled down an embankment into a slush-filled ditch by the tracks. Engineer Gagnon followed right behind and dealt the final blow with his lantern that rendered him unconscious.

They gently led the young woman into the depot. The ticket master who had witnessed it all from his window and notified the police and ambulances, helped ease her onto a waiting room bench.

The train's conductor A. H. Barnes of nearby Franklin meanwhile attempted to calm the commotion inside the coach where the forty remaining passengers were in total uproar.

"Lynch him" "Kill him!" "Kill him!" shouted those banging on the windows. Others recoiled in fright. But he allowed no one to move until the Millis police chief William Thorne arrived to take charge of the killer and post a watch over the dead body. The entire episode – a seeming lifetime – had lasted only twenty minutes.

Usually the stuff of horror fiction, this really happened, and to the most unlikely people. The murdered man was the grandfather I never knew: Percy Clarkson Russell, 44, a tall patrician descendant of New England clergymen who with his equally tall, equally patrician wife Elizabeth and one baby daughter took up residence in the town of West Medway, a short drive from the crime scene, in 1900 on a spread called The Homestead that included a main dwelling, a barn, several outbuildings, an apple orchard and an acre or so of open field beyond. Their remaining five children would be born there, the youngest aged 11 at the time.

They were longstanding members of the Baptist Church, active in local civic affairs and well regarded in the community. For twenty-odd years Percy had been assistant manager of the offices of C. Moench Sons, a fine leather goods producer on Beach Street, Boston. It was from there he was returning that evening. (Ironically his half brother Arthur Perkins Russell was vice president of the New York New Haven & Hartford Railroad, operator of the

line, whose major concern was “*passenger safety*”).

The wounded young woman was Percy's second child Grace Helena, 21. A graduate of Medway High School she was attractive and talented and possessed a remarkable contralto voice that she hoped one day would lead to an operatic career. Four days a week she commuted to and from Boston with her father to attend secretarial school mornings and private vocal lessons afternoons. Occasionally performing with a Back Bay oratorio society and other venues in the city, she was also a member of her parents' church choir.

Grace had her mother's strength of character, never more so than when the ambulance delivered her to the Framingham Hospital. Throughout the harrowing ordeal she remained conscious and was said to have calmly directed the surgeons in attending to her wounds. At her request the family physician Dr. Wyman drove her mother to the hospital to be by her side. The prognosis was that she would recover but probably need skin grafting.

A sadder and less disciplined ambulance followed the same route carrying the manacled murderer, barely breathing and bleeding internally. He was not expected to survive.

On the coach, undertakers arrived and removed the dead body. Passengers were allowed to walk about and the train started up again. There continued to be intense anger, frustration and speculation about the killer's identity and actions. But the two persons with the answers would be lying soon in the same hospital fifteen miles away.

Friday, February 24, 1922

Kingston E. Jeffers died of the self-inflicted gunshot wound at 10:35 a.m. Two members of the Framingham American Legion stood vigil at his bedside to the end. In part of a dying statement he said he knew he'd shot Percy Russell but had no recollection whatever of shooting or battering Miss Russell, which he regretted deeply. The funeral was as yet unarranged.

Grace Russell had known her assailant almost since birth. Jeffers was nine years her senior but his parents Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Jeffers had lived only a half dozen houses away from the Russell Homestead for as long as she could remember. Because of the age difference they were never childhood playmates or even close acquaintances. He and two brothers had gone off to serve in World

War I when she was just a young teenager.

Jeffers joined the United States Ordinance Department and was assigned first to Raritan, N.J. and later to Montreal, but never went overseas. He returned to live with his parents in West Medway after the war. His current employment was bookkeeper for the Middlesex and Boston Street Railway at the Newton office.

He began attending services at the same Baptist Church as the Russells in 1920 and it was thought that was when the two began seeing each other. Far from being the only man Grace was dating at the time, he was the oldest and pressured her the most seriously. She still aspired to a singing career and a different lifestyle from that of a small town, so continued to reject his offers of marriage. (Newspaper accounts later described them as “estranged lovers” who had “broken their engagement”, but that was almost certainly not the case.) They did eventually quarrel however and he quit the church and began attending the Congregational parish further up on Main Street, but persisted in his attentions to her.

Jeffers seemed unable – or unwilling – to take “no” for an answer. He became obsessed, sending Grace notes from Newton, at first endearing then increasingly more hostile and threatening. Percy, concerned for his daughter’s safety, contacted William Ollendorff, the local police chief and a prominent figure in West Medway. Ollendorff promised to place Jeffers under round-the-clock surveillance.

The final disturbing element in Jeffers’ dying confession was his claim to have received a message at 11 a.m. the previous morning telling him if he didn’t marry the girl at once he would be arrested and jailed and that worried him all day. He expired before the source of the message could be revealed, but that left Chief Ollendorff in a possible predicament. When disclosing Jeffer’s death to the news media he added that a warrant for Jeffers’ arrest actually had been issued the morning of February 23rd but that he, Ollendorff, had not yet found an opportunity to serve it.

If the murderer was not hallucinating, then it was entirely possible someone – from the law enforcement office? – might have warned Jeffers to give him time to act before being arrested, never realizing that an impending tragedy could have been averted by a swifter completion of duty. However no investigations were sought at the time or answers recorded for posterity.

Sunday, February 26, 1922

The funeral for Percy Clarkson Russell took place at his Homestead at 2:30p.m. with the Reverend Neal McLean officiating. The pall bearers included the town selectmen and other dignitaries as well as Chief Ollendorff. Newspaper coverage rhapsodized on the profusion of gorgeous floral arrangements that filled the main house. A male quartet from Boston, one that Russell must have especially admired, rendered some of his favorite songs in close harmony. There was a huge turnout of mourners both there and at nearby Evergreen cemetery where the body was interred in the family plot. Grace was still recuperating in the hospital and wasn't present.

Another funeral was held at the Jeffers home an hour later for Kingston E. Jeffers. The pall bearers were members of the American Legion as were many of the mourners. Newspapers also noted the lovely flowers and a goodly crowd. There was no mention of a burial place.

From then on that generation of Russells seldom spoke again publicly of the incident. Even privately to one another it was referred to as "the accident", not to pretend it never happened but to protect the living it had affected so lamentably. The next generation, kept relatively uninformed, treated it as so much ancient history.

Coda

Grace Helena Russell remained hospitalized for several weeks after her arm was operated on and placed in a cast, mainly to recover from shock. Over time the emotional and physical aspects eased. But there was one reminder of that night in Millis that would never go away. Her arm, in spite of skin grafts, was left with hideously discolored scars. She wore long-sleeved garments winter and summer for the rest of her life to hide the memory.

But it *was* a life and lived the way she wanted. She met and married a baritone from the church choir she joined in Boston, her new home. Roger Gallison was intelligent, amusing and a top executive of a large import firm. He amassed wealth. She helped invest it. He bought her a ten-room haven on Belmont Hill to keep her safe from harm and filled it with choice English antiques and Chinese porcelains. They installed a baby grand. He played and

she sang. They listened faithfully to Saturday matinee operas on the radio with Milton Cross. They enjoyed live Symphony Hall concerts and visiting opera presentations. They read aloud to each other by the fire. They trekked Yosemite.

Though Grace continued appearing with oratorio and church choirs she never realized her goal of becoming a Metropolitan Opera star, but she befriended a great one. Eleanor Steber and she lunched often and sang duets occasionally until international fame carried the soprano off on wings of renown. Meanwhile the Gallisons were developing their own roles: his was the country squire, Harris tweeds and brier pipes; hers the Duchess of Windsor, white gloves and garden clubs. After his retirement the warmer months were spent on their farm high in the White Mountains - Boston was no place for long sleeves in August.

Decades passed serenely and orderly with few surprises. She avoided surprises. Visitors were asked to telephone before arriving and she never opened the door to strangers. Slowly Roger's mind failed. He quietly slipped away into Alzheimers and died. Grace took up painting again to fill the void and produced exquisitely intricate gold-leafed trays until her fingers grew gnarled by the arthritis that invaded her entire body. She had to sit backwards on the stairs to raise herself up to her bedroom and eventually moved into the maid's quarters off the kitchen.

Even so, at 92 and on a cane, she was still capable of serving afternoon tea in accustomed style amidst the burnished pleasures of her drawing room. For a while she enjoyed reminiscing about the golden years with her beloved Roger, alternately forgetting and repeating details. Finally she forgot everything and withered.

My aunt died in February 1993 and was placed alongside her husband and father and mother in the Evergreen family plot. By then any reminder of that other February night so very long ago would have been no more than a small silent scream preserved in amber.

February 1, 2008

Kingston E. Jeffers



I LOVE A PARADE

Its official title is SEMINOLE TRIBE OF FLORIDA ANNUAL ORANGE BLOSSOM FESTIVAL. RODEO AND PARADE, but to most locals it is simply known as the Davie Rodeo Parade. Held the last week of February each year, it is a two-day event in the town of Davie in Broward County, Florida, nine miles southeast of Fort Lauderdale. My horse country, my dad was proud to say, seeing's how he and my mom lived sort of midway between the two. They took in most of the horse related events in the town, though neither one was a particular fancier. They regularly attended a nearby racetrack in Southern Massachusetts before they retired, mostly to watch sulky racing. But they never went in for betting, preferring to just sit in the stands and enjoy the spectacle of the sleek horses and brightly costumed drivers on those impossibly flimsy wheels going through their paces. In Davie it was more for the social thing.

The parade usually introduced the festive weekend on the morning of the first day, followed by a free pancake breakfast sponsored by the Kiwanis Club, a livestock fair, cook-offs, a craft show and strawberry festival. The rodeo took up all the second day and required tickets for admission. It all dated back to the early 1950s, when Davie, a growing conservative community, found itself home to an increasing number of ranches and single horse owners. The parade was a hit from the get go.

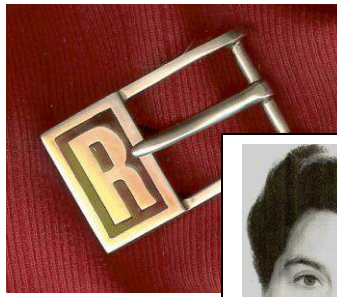
Dad, eager to impress me and my buddy down from New York City, had staked out the perfect viewing place days before. It was on a slight knoll above the parade route and on the street side of a very high billboard advertising Listerine, with thick trees behind guaranteeing shade from morning on (noonday heat could be especially brutal in those parts). Mom had made sandwiches the night before and brewed a thermos of tea to store in the fridge until the last minute ice cubes were added.

The parade was to start at 9:30a.m., so, typical of my father, he wanted to be there by 8 so no one else would muscle in. He was that way with everything. It was his nature. So the four of us piled into his car with a food hamper and folding chairs, sun lotion and

baseball caps. We were, as usual, the first ones there. Dad had chosen a perfect site. We sat and read books and a newspaper until parade time. Others slowly gathered around and beneath us, but none blocked our view. There was a sudden air of festivity and expectation. The kids grew restless.

Drumbeats in the distance signaled the start of the parade, and very soon Seminoles appeared on horseback in full ceremonial regalia: fringed and beaded buckskin outfits, spectacular billowing feather headdresses and highly decorated staves. Most of them looked sternly ancient but so erect in their saddles. Their magnificent steeds kept a slow regal pace. Then came the members of the Davies Kiwanis Club, a ragtag bunch in business suits, out of step and fraternizing back and forth, followed by snappy police units from as far as Lauderdale on foot. Women from some order or other marched up next in evening gowns and high heels, each sporting a sparkly headband featuring a single red feather sticking up out of the back. A wide banner announcing the festival was held by the front row.

There were several trucks tricked out – unsuccessfully – as floats from local sponsors. After that, old and new fire engines and ladders from six surrounding towns inched past, cheered mightily by kids in front as the uniformed firemen waved back, all spit and polish. They were followed by a ten piece fife and drum corps from middle school. Then, finally, came what all were there for: a hundred or more saddled horses with riders in cowboy hats gesticulating wildly. It was an impressive sight to behold. But no sooner had they reached us, than the fire engines up ahead blasted their sirens in unison. It startled us all, but caused havoc with the horses: every one of them reared, whinnied and defecated, as if on cue. The street was awash in baseball size droppings. To roars and cat-calls, the riders quieted their animals and proceeded. But what followed next had us almost falling out of our folding chairs. A corps of baton-tossing drum majorettes in shakos had to check where their tasseled white boots stepped before each toss. They bumped each other, lost all formation – not to mention a few soiled batons – daintily trying to keep their boots from being defiled. Those in the big marching band bringing up the rear had no such delicate choices. They simply slogged on, scattering manure left and right with every oompah-pah. When even the sidewalks became doo-dappled it was time to go. We chose the grass route back to the car.



PEG

My first encounter with Peg was in 1960 when she descended on Joseph Hirsch's life classes at The Art Students League like a minor dynamo, giving every one the impression of a savvy woman-about-town in a hurry. Arriving never less than twenty minutes late for morning classes, she'd blow in on the tail end of a tornado – six feet of breathless energy giant-stepping the dusty floor boards with the belt of her raincoat often dragging behind like a lightning ground.

Imposingly tall, but well proportioned and surprisingly lithe, she would maneuver around the other students' bilious and bloody palettes with all the dexterity of a trained dancer (which she was) and send ripples across the silent concentration that tended to settle over the classroom like grey gauze. As she whizzed by, bodies shifted, coughed and stamped their feet like petulant horses in a stable. By the time she'd reach her easel, which was usually next to mine, those nearest to her instinctively felt her presence and, without looking up from their work, automatically moved aside or back slightly to accommodate her. We all knew from experience that she demanded more creative space than we did, and figured it was safer to re-adjust early than to suffer bumped easels and overturned turp cans when she got down to the serious choreography of painting.

Quickly doffing coat and scarf, she'd pry open her paint box and position the broken off slab of plate glass she used for a palette on a stool, then carefully unfurl a greengrocer's apron that she'd snap once in the air and tie twice around her waist. She'd then go to retrieve her stretched canvas, which was easy to spot, being the largest, wettest and most warped in the drying racks and return to

lean it against the wall. Stepping back and squinting at it with a fresh eye, she'd invariably hate the results of the previous day's efforts and be overcome by mild back-of-the-hand-to-the-forehead nausea.

With a frustrated shrug and sigh she'd grab the nearest palette knife (often mine) and scrape off as much of the old paint as possible before propping the canvas back on the easel upside down. Starting over was the only remedy. She'd seldom work a painting for more than one session or hardly ever finish one. Like the legendary Sisyphus who was forever doomed in Hades to push a heavy rock uphill only to have it roll back down again, she seemed incapable of getting beyond the nitty-gritty of creation to any kind of satisfying culmination (a trait that was to frustrate most of her undertakings).

The last step in her pre-painting preparation was to push both sleeves of her shirt up above the elbows and tuck the collar under all around. Then she was ready to battle the muse. She'd stand momentarily fixed, arms akimbo, staring (or, rather glaring) at Mr. Hirsch's setup of the day on the posing stand, uttering low clucking sounds of disapproval while slowly shaking her head side to side.

Joe Hirsch was a popular social realist painter and a superb colorist, and his following was large and enthusiastic. But he could be an indifferent teacher who, in place of criticism, absent-mindedly offered ambiguous aphorisms that came across like vague Confucian pronouncements ("he who uses yellow lives in shade") that left some students puzzled and paralyzed. I remember standing with arms folded, tapping the handle of a brush against my teeth and staring into space in complete bewilderment after one of his rounds.

Peg liked Hirsch personally (we were together invited several times to his upper Westside studio) and admired his color sense and brushwork. But she would have none of his busy nude-surrounded-by-heaps-of-gnarled-fabric-holding-a-phone kind of arrangements. So she would set about deconstructing them on her canvas with a vengeance. Slapping wide shocking pink strokes across and down the middle with a flat hardware store brush to suggest the model's pose, she would then scrub in big solid discordant pillow shapes round them, deftly and quickly creating a skeletal cartoon that revealed the silliness of the setup, and in the process

work up such a sweat that the inner rim of her thick halo of chestnut hair would be plastered black against her beady temples and brow. She frequently would have to wipe a forearm across her face to clear her eyes. It was at such times as these that minor accidents began to occur. In her exuberance neighboring turpentine bottles had a penchant for being spilled and palettes knocked askew. By the end of a session she was literally sloshing in a litter of soggy paper towels and repeated “so sorry”s.

Peg treated paint like children treat mud, and the contrasts between her splattered hands and clothes to those of the neighboring neatly smocked “paintresses” with fresh manicures tucked into white cotton gloves to preserve them for lunch later at the Pierre, was hilarious. As a good friend and one-time president of the League, Lloyd Sherwood, was always quick to point out, many of the finest serious artists in America of the 19th and 20th centuries studied there (Oscar Wilde tried to book in a lecture in 1882 and was rejected as too frivolous). But it always had to rely on the steady patronage of some contemporary variant of the Ladies Who Lunch to keep the fires stoked and the doors open. Those paragons of inspired gentility could still be found in ample numbers in all the classes, valiantly attempting to translate a brief moment of beauty to canvas in the short time they had free between social engagements. They represented, as a matter of fact, the very class and life style that Peg was continually rebelling against. But likely as not they didn’t recognize her as a renegade from their own ranks as they eyed her warily over half-glasses.

“She’s all over the place isn’t she?” one stage-whispered to another once when Peg suddenly made a twenty-yard dash to the back of the room for a long shot of her canvas, catching her toe in the shoulder strap of the lady’s parked purse and dragging it with her.

“Incorrigible!” muttered a companion, working a tiny spot of vermilion into the model’s cheek.

To them, Peg was a bull in a china shop – an unpredictably intrusive distraction. To me she was a breath of fresh air.

In Memory New York City February 1965



MARCHING SONG (1960) Gate Theater, NYC

L-R Peg Santvoord Brooke Hayward
 Martin Brant Kevin McCarthy

Author's Note: Peg Santvoord became a dear friend. We often went on painting excursions in her VW Beetle . She was also an actress and film producer. In December 1964 she married and spent her honeymoon in Taxco, Mexico at my suggestion . Soon after she and her new husband, an architect and pilot, flew back to their home in St.Croix.

A month later, flying to another Virgin Island, their plane crashed. They and three others were killed . Her sister and I set up a foundation for the performing arts in her name. In the plane's wreckage was found a silver buckle with an R on it – custom made in Taxco, a town I lived in for many summers. Her family, aware it was meant for me, presented it at our first foundation meeting in April 1965.

THE QUEEN AND I

It was the second Sunday of November, 1988, and London was bitterly cold. For all the time I'd spent there, I never could decide which was worse – bitterly cold or bitterly wet. Either condition was unsettling. It happened that on that particular morning it was a little of both – alternately – and just when I'd promised myself that was the year I would finally attend Remembrance Sunday. It was one of those important events that should be experienced at least once, yet, like climbing the Statue of Liberty for long-time New Yorkers, it is often postponed indefinitely.

As I left my hotel – the charming Art Deco Tavistock – and headed down Woburn Place toward Russell Square in a raincoat and slouch hat, I was reminded of the first time I landed in that vicinity by chance many years before. My destination was Kings Cross Railroad Station to travel somewhere out of town, and, with plenty of time on my hands, decided to walk from where I was. Sauntering along, I happened on a lovely little park that had to be crossed diagonally to regain the station road. Finding that it was called Russell Square, and that there was a famous hotel facing it by that name – as well as my own – I began doing a little research.

What I found was that the entire property it occupied, including much of the surrounding area called Bloomsbury (remember Eliza Doolittle's lament: "All I want is a room in Bloóms- bu- ry..."?), had been the private realm of the Dukes of Bedford for centuries. It still was. And their family name was, and still is, Russell. My goal was to try to determine if there was any possibility *their* Russell was earlier connected in some way to *my* Russell. My father had an interest in genealogy, at least his, and arranged for an acquaintance in Boston who delved into such matters professionally, to construct his family tree. The result was that the family was descended from a William Russell who came to America from England on the 'Second Mayflower' in 1630. (It was also surmised that a number of the passengers on that voyage were less than upstanding types, leading to a passed-down family joke that our name was actually a corruption of 'rustler'.)

The friend's research also ascertained that same William the First with wife and son did settle in the Boston area that same year. He also traced everything about our forebears from then on, but nothing before. I took up his mantle, determined to trace the British lineage myself. Contact was made with a certified genealogist in Plymouth, England. After poring over our family tree at length, he wrote a humorous, but discouraging reply that Russell in the United Kingdom in that period was as prevalent a surname as Jones or Smith in the United States. Besides, very few vessels had reliable, if any, passenger lists then. It was a known fact that if someone showed up on the pier at Plymouth, England, with cash in hand and a boat hadn't yet hoisted anchor, that party could somehow be squeezed on board. No name needed. No papers necessary. Sea captains were as greedy a lot as any.

The genial genealogist opined that my finding a direct connection with the Dukes of Bedford was as likely as the proverbial needle in a haystack, and advised me to save my money by simply claiming descent from the House of Bedford. There was almost no way of refuting it, except in the near present tense, where he assumed I would certainly not be so foolhardy as to consider myself eligible for any immediate considerations of inheritance. As a concession he offered a full color print of the Bedford coat of arms suitable for framing. I declined.

Tracing my lineage was more a pastime than an obsession anyway. But thereafter whenever I was in London, I stayed at the Tavistock (which the Duke of Bedford owned), the lavish Hotel Russell, or some nearby bed sitter. Once I even lived for a month above a hardware store because it was beside the Russell Square Underground Station. In a proprietary sense I thought of the park in the square as my own when I was in residence. There was a tiny eatery long run by a friendly Armenian family in one corner that was good for a quick supper after a day of beating the pavements, or a quick coffee to jump start the a.m. And best of all, they remembered my name. Remarkable!

So I was personally disturbed to learn from a fellow bench sitter one morning that the Duchess of Bedford (an American) was planning to personally inspect the park that afternoon to check out the overgrowth of shrubbery around the periphery. Seemed that late night strollers were alarmed by the sexual activity, mostly male, going on in the bushes, and after being informed of it by the police,

she was determined to do something about it. Her immediate plan was to tear out all the bushes and small trees and plant low flower beds in their stead. She told the local tabloid reporters that she bore no prejudice against the activity per se, but was “damned sure I’m not going to condone it on my property”. A small band of protesters (mostly gay) planned to march (diagonally) through the Square while she was there, promising plenty of news coverage. What surprised me was that I had been sitting in that park in the evenings for years and never surmised a bloody thing. Being a Russell I felt somehow cheated on not having been apprised of the situation, and therefore left before any placard carriers appeared. After a small media ruckus, the whole affair subsided and I never heard a thing about it again. The duchess did not change the landscape of the park after all, and its flora and fauna – and the occasional rustle (Russell?) in the bushes – remained very likely as it had been in the time when Eliza Doolittle was seeking lodging.

The Underground Station was just along a side street off the park. One realized how frightfully deep the subway system was in London by taking the elevator to the level of the Picadilly Line, and, on reaching Leicester Square, maneuvering a further flight of stairs down to catch the Northern Line for another short hop to Westminster Station – up and down narrow stairways, rickety escalators, and banging elevators, a part of London life redeemed only by the ever-present buskers on the landings, whose serenading often sweetened the journey.

Emerging from the station, the first thing in view was the world’s most renowned phallic symbol, Big Ben, and beyond it the Houses of Parliament rising on the Thames like clusters of sharpened pencils pointing skyward. Bearing right, then wading across an almost impenetrable mass of interlocking traffic, I paused for breath on a tiny green respite, raised a two-fingered victory salute to Winston Churchill, hovering over his base, and continued on. Across the next traffic obstacle rose the great Westminster Abbey in all its gothic splendor behind its modest lady-in-waiting, St. Margaret’s Church. Once the main church for the Abbey when it was strictly a monastery, old St. Margaret’s had been reduced over time to a scantily attended adjunct after the Abbey itself was converted to a cathedral to accommodate the increasing hoards of commoner – and royal – worshipers it attracted.

Both Westminster Abbey (officially named the Collegiate

Church of St. Peter) and St. Margaret's were made "royal peculiars" by Elizabeth I, meaning they were the property of the Crown and not under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury. A great triangular lawn, stretching the length of an Abbey wall behind St. Margaret's and bounded street side by a sidewalk from in front of the old church to a point near the western entrance of the Abbey, was filled that commemorative day with small white wooden crosses, each bearing a red paper poppy at its center, and set out on the grass in typically neat English symmetry, with sections reserved for each of the different service organizations. Anyone could "buy" a cross for a small fee and be lent a little mallet to hammer it into the ground and write a private memorial message in indelible ink. The proceeds went to aid retired indigent veterans. It had been a tradition since the end of World War I, with a large section added for American fallen after World War II.

I thoughtfully wandered the rows pondering the tributes. The white crosses were glossy from the encroaching mist. The little poppy petals winked under the weight of drops from overhead trees. From some deep trivia recess I recalled that only the British poppies were flat and had been designed by a Frenchwoman. Those of other nations were always multipetalled. The World War I Armistice was signed at 11 a.m. on November 11, 1918, hence the numerous references to "the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month". A military physician, John McCrae, wrote the poem beginning "In Flanders Fields the poppies blow, Between the crosses row on row....." and lines from it graced some of the crosses before me. McCrae, a Canadian, penned the famous lines just after the terrible battle in the Ypres salient in the spring of 1915. Not happy with it, he tossed it to the ground, where it was retrieved by another officer, who sent copies to newspapers in England. The Spectator in London rejected it, but Punch published it in its entirety in December of that year. It became a lasting legacy, memorized thereafter by every school child. Further along the path another cross sadly remembered the killing of 11 civilians at the Cenotaph in Enniskillen, North Ireland by an IRA bomb in 1987. It had been a very touching experience, but the chilly weather that only enhanced the sadness also made me shiver, so I sought incremental warmth inside the Abbey.

On entering, the first thing to draw attention beyond the center door was the tomb of the Unknown Warrior. Its usually pristine

slab imbedded in the floor was literally smothered in poppies. Enclosed by guard chains, it is the only floor level tomb marker in the entire Abbey that may not be trespassed at any time. That special morning military personnel stood at attention at its four corners. Visitors were taking single poppies from their lapels and gently placing them on it in passing, some mouthing silent words. I skirted the memorial and took a favorite course directly down the middle of the nave from west to east. As anticipated the scent of antiquity was palpable, the aura of majesty inspiring. Begun in the 11th century by Edward the Confessor to house an order of Benedictine monks, it eventually became one of the most renowned cathedrals in the world. Thirty eight coronations from William I (the Conqueror) to Elizabeth II had been held so far in its august setting, many of them using the same 700-year-old high gilded wood coronation chair that once permanently held the Stone of Scone underneath. (It was subsequently stolen and sent back to Edinburgh Castle in Scotland where it originated, and lent back for coronations. But that's another story). The chair was kept on view in the apse behind the great altar.

Looking up was the first thing I did on reaching the nave. That way its stark gothic stone features were most prominently revealed soaring high above: pointed arches; ribbed vaulting (the highest gothic vault in England at 102 feet); flying buttresses; brilliant rose windows sharply piercing the gray. It was influenced by French church architecture that sought to beguile the eye beyond the overwhelming stretch of pointed arches to the center, the beating heart, of the cathedral – the Choir (Quire). This one was designed as an interim relief from its overwhelming surroundings, a narrow, almost cozy corridor nestled just beyond the transepts (cross sections at right angles to the long nave that gave a cathedral its cruciform shape). One passed through a low central archway under the wrought iron rood screen that gave the Choir its sense of proportion. Alternating black and white marble squares formed the floor, and ornately carved oak choir stalls rose in tiers on both sides. This one also boasted little red lamp shades (a homey English touch) to soften the light of electric bulbs in white faux candles set in brass candlesticks on the front music stands along each section. They seemed to create a warm glow, but afforded dim light indeed for the thirty resident choirboys and twelve professional adult male singers (called Lay Vicars) to read music by. That was taken care

of by a bit of theatrical lighting wizardry called pin lights that originated higher than anyone could see and beamed down on each singer. The glow on the central checkerboard was generated by another series of lights, also too high to detect.

Behind the last rows of stalls the walls were covered in royal blue damask under gilded arches whose thin sides reached down to define each stall. To the right, just inside the main archway, steps curved up to a kind of corner throne reserved for the sovereign. The eastern end of the Choir, with a small lectern to the left for homilies, opened onto the semicircular high altar area, with expanded seating on both sides. During coronation ceremonies seating was arranged in tall tiers facing the center where the Coronation Chair rested in front of the altar steps. I found that attending Evensong at 5p.m. was the most satisfying service of all. With the tourists gone and the main cathedral lights turned off, it had the quiet intimacy of a private chapel in late afternoon, especially when seated in the loft itself beside or behind the singers. Solemnly the choirboys would enter by twos through the main archway in signature red cassocks (matching the lamp shades) with white ruffs that must have harked back to the reign of Elizabeth I. The smallest or youngest – ages began at eight – would go first, splitting up to fill the first rows of stalls on each side, the taller ones following into the second rows. Bringing up the rear would be the twelve lay vicars in black robes and the choirmaster who would proceed to a music stand set up at the center of the black and white tiled floor.

Reaching the Choir that Remembrance morning I saw no choirboys around, but found that simply being there brought back memories of past Evensongs and their voices piping pure and clear up to the rafters. As an example of the effect of their music and the setting, I once badgered Carl, a dear friend from New York, into attending a service. We had a common interest in ship travel and shared cabins to Southampton on two of the Cunard Line's most famous trans-Atlantic beauties named for British queens. Carl was a confirmed non-believer with no interest in liturgical music at all, so it took some doing. However, after the final notes of their anthem faded and the men and boys departed as they came, to a soft organ postlude, he remained seated with tears in his eyes, staring ahead as if transfixed by what he had just witnessed. I sat with him until the sexton politely asked us to leave. As we passed back along the darkened nave to the exit, he quietly – I'd like to say re-

verently – admitted he couldn't remember ever being so touched. He spoke for both of us.

I continued my memorial morning tour of the apse with its tombs of past sovereigns, still amazed that Elizabeth I was placed so near Mary Queen of Scots who, in life, she'd had beheaded. After a cursory glance at the names on the tombs and memorials in the Poet's Corner to see if they'd remained ageless, I came upon a section of the cathedral not seen before. It was an area that had been damaged by bombs in WWII and left as a sad reminder of the horrors of war. Next door was a lovely little chapel devoted to those of the RAF who had been lost, with a poignant stained glass window incorporating all the air force insignia. Returning full circle to the nave again, poppies continued being placed on the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, and I noticed for the first time the statues of 20th century martyrs flanking the doors to the street. On leaving I caught a glimpse of one, Martin Luther King.

The drizzle had stopped outside, but the bone-chilling cold hadn't. With an hour or so to get to the Cenotaph in Whitehall for the ceremony, I sauntered over to Parliament Square, my thoughts on the day and its meaning, especially to the people of London who suffered so greatly from effects of Nazi bombings in the last war. I wondered if I would see any of the Royal family at the wreath laying. Mostly I hoped to get a glimpse of the Queen Mother, officially known as Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother to differentiate her from her daughter Elizabeth, the current monarch. Affectionately dubbed Queen Mum, she was the one most people thought of when reminiscing. Images of her and her husband, the stuttering, ill King George VI, stepping over the rubble of St. Paul's Cathedral after a direct hit, were still emblazoned on many minds. They had refused to leave London during the blitz (but sent their children the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose to Windsor Castle for the duration). She even won over the hearts of prickly East Enders. When she first went to inspect the damage in their area, they threw rotten vegetables at her because she appeared, as usual, beautifully dressed and coiffed, while they remained in bombed out destitution. Her reasoning was that when they were presented to her, they wore their best finery, and she felt under the circumstances they would expect her to reciprocate. They came to see it as a term of respect, and subsequently cheered her return visits. All Britain praised her plucky steadfastness and bravery.

Under that gently smiling visage in its pretty upturned hats was a woman with determination of steel.

My interest in her stemmed from a collection I started of British Coronation commemorative tins – for toffee, tea, biscuits or candy – and found her image and that of her husband on many of them, along with other ephemera and bits of historical information. For example, on her wedding day in April 1923, as she entered Westminster Abbey she laid her bridal bouquet on the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior. The gesture endeared her immediately to the public, and so it was continued afterward in every royal wedding there, with some of the young brides choosing to place their bouquets on *leaving* the service. She was often called the “Music Hall” queen, for her penchant for theatrically draped flounces, wide picture hats (always turned up in front to expose her face) and fluffy fur stoles. Eleanor Roosevelt found her a bit too regal in demeanor. But the gay community took to her and her “high camp” wit like bees to honey after she’d become a dowager. In the course of a very long life (she was already 88 in 1988) tales mounted of incidents or overheard conversations in public with this or that well known stage or screen actor with a “flair” or “a dash” as the press described them. As she ascended the stairs to a gala benefit reception on the arm of Noël Coward, the famous playwright, song writer, actor, author, you name it, who made no bones about his private inclinations if not encounters, she noticed that he was eyeing the very tall, very handsome Queen’s Guards flanking the way. Still smiling and looking straight ahead to her waiting guests, she murmured, *sotto voce*, “I wouldn’t if I were you, Noël. They count them before they put them out.”

Two men with “flair” and “dash” who were her favorite cohorts were the society photographer and theatrical designer Cecil Beaton (“*My Fair Lady*”) and long time devoted fashion designer Norman Hartnell, who introduced her to the shade of blue that became her favorite ensemble color. Hartnell was a close friend of an acquaintance of mine also, Father Augustine Hoey, a one-time actor turned Anglican priest, who accompanied him occasionally to Balmoral Castle in Scotland when the Queen Mum was in residence. He and Hartnell were with her in her drawing room one notable afternoon waiting for drinks that had not yet been served. Impatiently she rose and went out into the hallway. Leaning over the balustrade of the stairwell she called to the kitchen staff in the basement, “I

don't know about you old queens down there, but this old queen up here wishes her gin and tonic now." Father Hoey's telling of the incident got repeated along the grapevine so quickly that in no time at all it became ageless legend.

Another time Father Hoey was strolling through her gardens reading his breviary when he spied what he thought was a hired gardener in a crushed fedora, worn overalls and torn sweater bent over a camellia bush. He remarked on the beauty of the blooms, and was surprised when the person straightened up to find it was none other than the Queen Mother herself. Wiping her dirtied bare hands on the sweater, she thanked him and said that she loved all flowers, but camellias were especially dear to her and she spent the most time on them. He asked if the exquisite sparkling brooch pinning back the brim of the battered hat was of real rubies and diamonds, and she replied that of course it was. She had to retain some semblance of her station in case, as with him, someone approached her unannounced as she "potted about". (The designer of her stunning "official" hats, that always matched her Hartnell outfits, had been Joy Quested-Nowell for over a decade.) In 1970 in London, when she was advised by the Conservative Minister to stop employing so many homosexuals in her palace, she ended her refusal to comply thusly, "Without them we'd all have to go self-service." And so the legends proliferated. The only humorous anecdote making the circuit that included her daughter – who was seldom anecdotal – was when the Queen Mother was sipping drinks with friends in a restaurant lounge and her daughter, Queen Elizabeth II, was leaving from another room and spotted her mother from a distance. "My, my," she remarked, "Look at the size of Mummy's martinis!" That, too, became legend.

Those recollections helped warm my trek toward Whitehall for the ceremonies. But I'd spent so long lingering, I'd forgotten the hour. By the time I grew near, the entire neighborhood was cheek by jowl jostlers. The London bobbies kept directing me alongside the buildings behind them, so I ended up in a small corner niche made by the outward protruding entranceway of the Department of Health. Before me the crowd was three deep, but luckily I was tall and could see over most heads, and discovered I was directly across from the Cenotaph where all the activity was to take place. That simple monolith, erected after the 1918 armistice (first in wood and plaster, later in Portland stone) got its name from the

the Greek: “*kenos*”- empty and “*taphos*”- tomb, and was placed in the center of Whitehall, a usually bustling thoroughfare at the very core of the city, now empty of traffic with throngs lining both sides. It had become a permanent memorial to the fallen in all Britain’s – and the world’s – conflicts.

Considering myself lucky to be so close to the action, I inwardly reveled that I had three, maybe four feet of space to maneuver between the wall and the last row of onlookers who were jammed forward against each other facing the street, and almost the length of the building to run back and forth at will. I noticed for the first time that all the figures directly in front of me were men, and they were all wearing embossed name tags under their poppies. This must have been a special section. I checked out the far end of the building, and the group of men there wore special tags also. I never learned who they all were, but obviously the bobbies had unknowingly led me to the most reserved area of all!

Before I could recover from that bit of luck, the sound of Big Ben striking 11 (the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month) signaled the beginning of the service. The crowds quieted. The men in front of me doffed their hats. Mine was still wet from the weather, but I removed it, exposing my bald pate to the elements. Looking around I was the only baldy in my section. The decision was to suffer the old silently. After the last stroke of Big Ben, in the distance H.M. Coastguard Royal Artillery fired a cannon indicating two minutes of silence, which was followed by, wonder of wonders, the appearance of all the lesser royals on the marble balcony of the Foreign Office across the street, draped for the occasion in royal blue with a thick gold braid swag anchored at both ends by large gold tassels. Present and accounted for were Princess Margaret and her children, Viscount Linley and Lady Sarah Armstrong-Jones, 27 and 25 respectively. Margaret was showing all the signs of a wasted life and appeared small and frail in the black they all wore. She looked like she’d rather have been somewhere else. Beside her was the Duchess of York, *nee* Sarah Ferguson who had married Prince Andrew three years earlier, and seemingly enjoying her current popularity with her bright smile and red hair bobbing in the breeze under a badly fitting black hat she kept fiddling with, but had not yet learned to wear with ease, like some relic from her grandmother’s attic she was forced to put on because custom dictated royal women had to appear in them at such occasions. Fergie,

Next to her was Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, born in 1964, the youngest of Queen Elizabeth's children. (There were four in all: Charles, Prince of Wales and heir to the throne, born in 1948; Anne, Princess Royal, born in 1950; Prince Andrew, Duke of York, born in 1960. The queen said the first two were for her country, the last two for herself.) Edward was something of a problem. Already at age 23 he was showing signs of, well, being gay, and, although British royalty throughout its history had been checkered with alternative life styles and survived, he presented a real challenge, especially to his father Prince Philip who wanted all his sons to join military service for a spell and indulge in the manly arts of hunting and sailing. But Edward instead joined the theater, working with Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber on his West End shows. He even made and starred in passable TV documentaries under the name Edward Windsor. To his credit, he was only the 4th member in the history of the Royal Family to earn a university degree, and he was the darling of his grandmother, the Queen Mum who appeared on his arm. Smaller than I expected, like most celebrities in person, she nevertheless, even on a cane from a recent fall, carried all her 88 years with accustomed aplomb. Under her large turned up black hat her eyes twinkled and her smile (showing slightly stained teeth) was genuine. She received muted applause.

Bringing up the rear behind the Queen Mum was the tall, beautiful blonde creature who had all England, and the world, buzzing – Diana, Princess of Wales. She and Prince Charles married in 1981 in a ceremony seen round the world. (I for one, rose at 3a.m. on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts to watch it live, lying on the floor with two pillows under my head.) They had two sons; William, born in 1982, and Harry, two years later. Her high fashion mourning statement was a huge black cartwheel hat with a white crown atop a black suit and a zebra striped scarf swirled about her neck. She held the hand of little tow-head William, the second in line to the throne. (In a doorway in the background a nanny held little Prince Harry). As if to balance the balcony, at the other end was the Queen's tall 2nd cousin, King Harald of Norway, in all his royal trappings. Crowded together on a lower balcony TV cameras of every size were set up from all around the world and at every possible angle.

Back at the ceremony: With many heads bowed, "The Last Post" was sounded by a single bugler of the Royal Marines, fol-

followed by the trumpeters of the Royal Air Force playing “The Rouse”. When the opening strains of Beethoven’s Funeral March were heard, all the men in front of me turned heads left, as did I, only to see Queen Elizabeth appear from the entranceway against which I leaned only five feet away. I gasped at the proximity. She stood small, looking rather dour in an unremarkable black hat and a crimped fur coat that in my mother’s day was called mouton lamb. From one gloved hand hung the ubiquitous black patent leather handbag. She waited until Prince Philip and their children Anne, Charles, and Andrew, all in regimental uniforms, fell in on either side of her. They slowly advanced to the Cenotaph where first she, then the others laid wreaths at its base, followed by the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Lord High Commissioner, First Sea Lord, *et al.*, right out of Gilbert and Sullivan. The Bishop of London prayed and the choir of Chapel Royal led the multitude in a rousing rendition of the National Anthem. The Royals returned whence they came, right past me, and the day-long parade of service veterans and military bands resumed. I left also, chilled from being bareheaded so long. It was a Remembrance Day to remember, but more for the thrill of seeing the entire Royal Family in the flesh – instead of as lithographed stock images in a tin collection.

My room at the Tavistock was never more inviting. I napped all afternoon, waking in time for the BBC TV news at 6. Excerpts from the Cenotaph event were shown and fun to watch from an opposite perspective. But my eye caught a disruptive round object darting this way and that in the background behind the crowd. It resembled one of those “Follow the Bouncing Ball” sing-along episodes in early movie theaters. As the camera zoomed in for a close-up of the Queen laying her wreath, there was my head just beyond hers. When it pulled back, it was definitely *my* bald dome bouncing around out there – the only one in a sea of thatched Brits. Pity I didn’t know. I’d have kept better time to “Rule Britannia”.

?



William Charles Anne Elizabeth II Philip

A (MERRY?) WIFE OF WINDSOR

One of the “quasi-” members of British Royalty, historically important to include at least, was the former American socialite Wallis Simpson, the double divorcee married to the short-term King Edward VIII in 1936. He abdicated before coronation to marry her and was given the title of Duke of Windsor by his brother, the new George VI, and made the governor of the Bahamas (1940-45). The couple despised Nassau, noting the climate, mosquitoes and natives – she added *Elba* to the return address on all her letters. After the war they settled in Paris, but soon, bored with each other in their *luxe* mansion, began royal progressions everywhere, emerging as international society’s most notorious parasites.

While he spent time badgering Parliament to make his wife ‘Her Royal Highness’ (it continually refused and she was locally addressed as ‘Her Grace’), she spent money lavishly on *haut couture* in Paris and priceless jewelry in New York – they often held court at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel on Park Avenue. She also loved theater, to see and be seen. Gossip columnists kept buzzing about possible *liaisons* with this or that handsome young escort, who, we knew, were mostly AC/DC anyway. (One, a flagrant Jimmy Donahue, his mommy a Woolworth heiress, boasted of it, *ad nauseum*, all over Fire Island. Also maintained he footed most of their bills.)

My encounter with the Duchess, as with the other royals, was mute, but earlier by a decade and closer at hand. The intermission ended at an opening night of a Broadway musical, and patrons began returning to their seats from the outer lobby. Four in front of me lingered and I couldn’t get past. I recognized Russell Nype, the tall crew cut hunk known for his role opposite Ethel Merman in ‘Call Me Madam’ in 1950. He and a couple I didn’t know were focused on the tiny figure with her back to me. Her dark hair formed a soft cap above a sparkling diamond necklace. She wore a full length black skirt topped by a long sleeved silver brocade jacket. Elegant as she was, I noticed one elbow had a ripped seam – not big, but *there*. When they started in, she smiled back at the cameras and I realized who it was. With anyone else I’d have long forgotten it. But that episode, with that woman, renowned as an arbitress of perfect taste – if nothing else, made me wonder if there *was* anything else. The duke died in 1972, she in 1986. Her words:

‘You have no idea how hard it is to live out a great romance.’

SHORT TAKES

*Based on Scribbled Notes and Recollections
Of People, Places and Situations Kept
Over Time in No Logical Order*



“I relished a taste of fame without
becoming gluttonous about it”

Donn Russell – Nantucket Studio – 1996

CELEBRITY STATUS

First there was a small restaurant on 9th Street in Greenwich Village called the Lion. In the back was a tiny room with no more than a dozen small round cocktail tables crowded almost up against a piano that itself was jammed against the back wall. The tiny space between them could only hold one person standing with a microphone under a pin light. The rest of the area was barely lit, as supper clubs tended to be in New York City in the early 1960s.

The owner of the restaurant decided to have a contest for the best new singing talent, determined by the patrons. The winner was promised a two-week engagement at another, more posh supper club, the Bon Soir, only a block away on Eighth Street between 6th Avenue and MacDougal Street.

The Bon Soir was one of a number of such establishments that proliferated in that era, mostly in cellars downstairs from the sidewalk. They catered mainly to elegant cafe society “pub” crawlers in the dining rooms. The adjacent bars were almost always packed tightly with young men on the make (often with each other), who were excellent judges of talent. The combination made for some memorable evenings hosted by Jimmy Daniels, a handsome singer who kept the shows varied. I remember the place being so dark that waiters carried tiny flashlights up their sleeves to bring refills.

An unknown eighteen year old, broke and needing work, was encouraged by several of the bar boys she had befriended to enter it. At the time she had no wish to become a vocalist. Her dream was to be an actress. She had appeared briefly in an Off Broadway play called ‘Driftwood’ with the then unknown Joan Rivers. Winning this contest meant money in her pocket, however, or maybe a meal or two. She was basically a loner, completely naïve about everything except her own aspirations and determination. Still officially living at home in Brooklyn with her mother, but, because of differences with her step- father, increasingly staying nights in the city with whoever of her new acquaintances would put her up, she even took to carrying a folding canvas cot around town along with a large shopping bag filled with the vintage clothing she was partial to wearing, gleaned from thrift shops, or as she called them, hock shops. Not rags, mind you, but outdated and eclectic – often eccentric – flapper era styles. Cover ups for inse-

curity. Or play clothes.

She decided to take the challenge and signed on to sing. The promise was \$50 a week and all the London Broil she could eat. Nothing about her outward appearance at the time was unusual. She was rather chunky, round faced and adolescent. Climbing up on the stool before the piano, she winced under the bright spotlight overhead, her straight hair lank and half draped over one eye. No one paid her any mind until she opened her mouth and began to sing. Then suddenly everyone grew silent.

The song chosen was the Harold Arlen/Truman Capote ballad 'A Sleepin' Bee' from 'House of Flowers'. Her high, thin, but pure voice with just a hint of nasality seemed to issue from some vast well deep inside the unlikely teenage frame. It had pathos, yearning and loneliness. In an era that was just beginning to rock and with the Beatle mania just around the corner, no one expected this throwback to "old fashioned" ballad singing. She was to make it her own. But it took time.

Needless to say, she won the prize and shortly opened at the Bon Soir, in a show headed by Phyllis Diller. She dropped a middle A in her first name and was introduced as Barbra Streisand. Not an overnight sensation, but almost, she took to creating a persona. First problem was her nose – it was too prominent and too long. But it was Diller who first advised her not to have it altered, certain that it could be her most distinguishing, and memorable, feature. A photographer friend showed how to emphasize her eyes to compensate, by widening them at each end by heavy black lines, a la Nefertiti. Another piled her hair up to resemble Audrey Hepburn's in 'Breakfast at Tiffany's'. They dubbed her their 'Nilotic Princess'. She kept the look for years.

Her gig at the Bon Soir was extended and word got around. One impressed customer was Orson Bean, comedian and TV actor who lived around the corner in MacDougal Mews. He was substituting as host for Jack Paar on the Tonight Show and had her appear. That led the owner of Bon Soir to book her into the Blue Angel up on East 52nd Street, the fashionable East Side. Still in bizarre hock shop outfits, she looked strangely at home there. But even with success, she still aspired to stardom as an actress. She made the rounds of agents mornings and even tried unsuccessfully to be admitted into Actors Studio. By then she had rented an apartment over Oscar's Fish Restaurant on 3rd Avenue at 66th Street, with the

bathtub in the kitchen, like one we had recently vacated ourselves in the Village. She no longer needed to rely solely on the kindness of strangers.

Arthur and I had become two of her most ardent admirers, but the Blue Angel was well out of our league. So it was just by luck I learned about the new late night talk show that was premiering in June of 1961, and that Streisand might be a regular. The program, called PM East was supposed to rival Jack Paar's 'To-night Show' and be on every weekday evening. It was taped late afternoons in the old Dupont Studios that didn't have space for regular audiences. I learned somehow that if we arrived early enough and there were only a few waiting at the door, we might be admitted. By hook or by crook we eventually got in to watch every show that she was on – while they lasted. Free.

The studio was ample but oddly arranged. Three-sided 'rooms' were created along opposite walls, opening onto a large central area where boom mikes and cameras on dollies could be rolled about at will. A talking guest could be interviewed in one cubicle while the next, with different décor and wall color scheme was being readied for another. That left space down the center for a few high swivel-seated stools in a row. We occupied those in the dark, and were told to tuck our feet inside the rungs and not budge while cameramen, crew and equipment noiselessly circled us back to, facing the 'rooms'. With a bit of straining we were able to view the procedure between and around the silhouetted technicians.

Initially 'PM East' aired for 90 minutes, but was later reduced to 60 minutes, and an extension of the show, PM West followed from San Francisco. The host for the west coast was Terence O'Flaherty while in New York it was co-hosted by Mike (Myron) Wallace and Joyce Davidson. I never cared for Mike Wallace, frankly. There was a defiant arrogance about his pock-marked face and manner. His interviewing style was confrontational and unpleasant. Even his smile was menacing. After serving in the navy, his main claim to fame was doing live Parliament cigarette ads (with smoke spiraling upward from one between his fingers). Later he hit the big time on CBS's '60 Minutes' and remained on it for decades.

Attractive, diminutive Joyce Davidson seemed to be there to ameliorate thorny situations between Mike and their guests. She softened his edges. Only once that I recall did she not succeed: Hollywood actor Burt Lancaster had been listening to Streisand

read him the funny lyrics of the 1958 Cole Porter ditty she was about to sing from the TV musical 'Aladdin' called 'Come to the Supermarket (In Old Peking)': ... "If you want a fancy fan, Or a turkey born in Turkey-stan, Or a slave that's awfully Afri-can, Or a teapot Early Ming – Come to the supermarket in old Peking..."

After she finished the number, Wallace sat across from Lancaster and began needling him about his legendary temper. He kept at it and kept at it until Lancaster really *did* get mad, stood up and walked off the set, right out of the building. Joyce was powerless to intercede between those two angry Titans. As the shows continued Streisand and Wallace also developed a mutual dislike. She said she didn't mind his provoking attitude, only just don't provoke her. He said she was too "self-absorbed". She countered that he was mean to her.

Lancaster aside, when interviews were going on with other guests, Streisand often isolated herself on a stool in the far corner of the studio, chewing gum and reading, or idly trying on new items of old clothes from her ubiquitous second-hand-shopping bag. One I remembered catching a glimpse of was a spectacular '20s pink feather coat. She ignored her surroundings in her 'self-absorption'. When she was signaled, she would park her gum under the stool seat (or sometimes on an overhead mike), walk to her position at the piano or wherever, and simply do what she did best: sing. That was why we were there. Forgetting all the tantrums and shenanigans credited to her by the media and gossips, we sat and absorbed the warmth of her voice like, well, a pink feather coat. Emitting from a petulant adolescent, it was remarkably mature: the softest tones tickled our senses and when she belted a loud high phrase it was a centuries-old mournful Semitic wail.

'PMEast' lasted only two years, but in that time a number of other new acts were introduced for the first time: Peter, Paul and Mary, and the Clancy Brothers are two that come immediately to mind. The talking guest lineups were basically the same as in 'The Tonight Show'. Barbra Streisand was the closest to being a regular entertainer, appearing at least seven times and rendering such classics as 'I Stayed Too Long at the Fair', 'Soon It's Gonna Rain', 'A Taste of Honey', 'My Honey's Loving Arms', 'Lover Come Back to Me', and 'Moon River'. When Mickey Rooney was on one night, they sang together 'I Wish I Were in Love Again'. Other recollections were 'Bewitched', 'Cry Me A River', 'When the Sun

Comes Out', and her initial hit, 'Sleepin' Bee'.

With such wide exposure, she was soon picked up for a solo spot in the musical "I Can Get It For You Wholesale". Using the same innate Yiddish inflections and words that salted all her regular speech anyway, she was a natural for the character. Within another year she became the star of a bigger hit show, about the life and legend of Fanny Brice, 'Funny Girl' on Broadway. And from there she became legend herself: a Hollywood mega-star, movie producer and director by age 27; hit records after hit records; personal appearances in sold out arena settings; mindless adoration by some, whom she treated with disdain. Example: during the filming of a TV special inside the Philadelphia Fine Arts Museum, a band of teen-age girls rapped insistently on the front door carrying a pot of chicken soup for their idol. The door guard asked if she wanted to let them in. No, she insisted, adding that all they wanted from her was more autographs that they would probably just go out and peddle anyway.

For similar reasons she was equally despised by others (there was even a robust Hate Barbra Anti-Fan Club with internet listings) – and so it went. We cared little for her later tempestuous outbursts, widely chronicled love affairs, gargantuan narcissism, chronic lateness. After 'Funny Girl' we weaned her away. It was only that voice we cared about and how it affected our senses. It had implications far beyond her years. Hearing it, even in elevators, aroused memories of the awkward ugly duckling in her outrageous play clothes, chewing gum in the far corner of her studio sandbox. It would take her a lifetime to catch up to the elegant creature already embedded in her throat, and we couldn't wait.

Times Square was the heartbeat of Manhattan from its inception in 1901. Before that it was called Longacre Square and was bordered, at least on the West by mostly dilapidated factories and warehouses, and rampant with all sorts of crime. The erection of the New York Times Building in that year on 44th Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, simultaneously with the Astor Hotel in the next block on Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets, issued in a new era of cultural possibilities. Henceforth the Square would be the epicenter of an industry dedicated to imagination and entertainment. Legitimate theaters sprang up like mushrooms around the area and later, motion picture palaces graced every other corner, along with restaurants of every description. It encompassed everything around the large X that the crossing of Broadway and Seventh Avenue created and spilled over into the adjoining side streets and beyond.

It was called Times Square because its owner, Adolph S. Ochs wanted an open square nearby to rival that of the New York Herald on its own Herald Square further downtown. The Astor Hotel was built by the estate of William Waldorf Astor to exude extravagance, and succeeded. The red brick and limestone exterior was a compendium (some said mishmash) of style features from Beaux Arts, Chinese, Louis XVI, Art Nouveau and Native American to French Renaissance. The signature mansard roof was green slate and copper. Inside, its eleven floors included lavish dining facilities for over 700 guests, a Ballroom, a Garden Room, imposing staircases and elegantly appointed private facilities, where the *crème de la crème* of society, the theatre world, European royalty, and well heeled tourists (who were beginning to arrive in droves – and never stopped) stayed in the lap of luxury. There was even an open roof garden with entertainment and dancing under the then not so gritty stars.

Its liveliest and longest remembered spot, however, was the famous first floor Astor Bar. All the above and half the world's gay blades arrived to "test its waters" (Gore Vidal). The room, by its other standards, was not extravagantly decorated, but who was looking? The main piece of furniture was an enormous oval black bar in the center. The bartenders were carefully chosen and wore freshly starched red jackets. If one was caught drinking or schmoozing with the clientele, they were instantly shone the door. Because it was as yet still unlawful to serve gays openly, but because they

made up a good part of the patronage nevertheless, the management compromised by dividing the bar in half – straights on one side of the long oval and they on the other. They had to dress properly and not be overly demonstrative. (The big complaint was that if you were on the straight side you could shout, sing, hug each other or do anything you wanted and not be bothered.) The bartenders were strict disciplinarians, at least on paper. A very savvy cigarette girl, when she passed through the gay section with her tray hung from her neck, would croak hoarsely, “Cigars, cigarettes, hairpins...”

In spite of all the supposed constrictions, both sides of the bar were six deep every night, with everyone having a good time and checking out possibilities. The Astor Bar hit its heyday during and just after World War II. Men in uniform were welcomed, and since word had spread that they might find free lodging and meals with patrons “over the oval” on a weekend pass if they played nice, a whole lexicography of eye movements, head nods, and thumbs indicating “meet you outside” was developed. It was said there were almost as many out on the sidewalk making arrangements as inside. One veteran, a valued friend of mine, remembered that on VE Day, “all Times Square was gay”.

I was too young for that, but I did hit the Astor Bar in the 1950s when I was working on a 3-11pm shift as a telephone travel consultant for the Auto Club of New York. With a buddy, Jay Gallagher, as Irish as any kid born in Brooklyn could be, and as funny, I’d go to late shows on 42nd Street, or just hang out at the Astor. He had a beautiful tenor voice and would sing along with the music. Nobody stopped him. After all, by then Cole Porter had become a regular (he drank absinthe), and everyone remembered the night he kissed Monty Woolley and sang “Have you heard that Minnie Starr just got pinched in the As-tor Bar?” (The song’s title was “Well, Did You Ever?” and he wrote it for the musical “DuBarry Was A Lady”).

There was another tune that mentioned the Astor, written in 1939 by Don Ray and Hugh Prince, with double-entendre lyrics and surprise punch line, and inimitably rendered by Pearl Bailey in 1959 with ribald overtones. It tells of a young woman named Minnie being all dressed up by her parents for a date at the hotel and having a mishap after she arrives there. The song’s title is also its first line:

*“She had to go and lose it at the Astor
She wouldn’t take her mother’s good advice
Now there aren’t so many girls today who have one
And she’d never let it go at any price....”*

It goes on for verse after verse about searching for it in all the rooms and under all the pillows, and questioning the bellboys, the doorman and the porter to no avail, and ends

*“....They just about completed all their searching
When the chauffeur walked up with it in his hand
All they did was stand and gape, there was Minnie’s sable cape,
And she thought that she had lost it at the Astor.”*

Chorus boys and girls would often drop by after their shows let out, to unwind and schmooze. Stars and their entourages also made brief appearances before heading up to the rooftop nightclub to dine and watch the floor shows. They were disappointed in June of 1952, however. The regularly scheduled entertainment had been cancelled, and since it was booked through the summer – never a good time to find immediate replacements – the anxious manager, a Tennessee native, got the bright idea to bring up the Grand Ole Opry from Nashville. A large contingency of country music notables was flown in with great hoopla, among them Hank Williams, Roy Acuff, Red Foley, Minnie Pearl, Carl Smith and new bride June Carter, along with a number of others, including the governor (who opened the show with a rendition of “Tennessee Waltz”). Bad move. It bombed! Sophisticated New Yorkers stayed away in droves. It was supposed to run for 16 weeks. It closed in four. Some of the bigger names got spots on local TV shows like the Kate Smith Show, but the rest slunk back to their rented plane and flew home. Never to return.

Others of us fared better on the night of March 9, 1955. The buzz around the Astor Bar was all about the James Dean movie, “East of Eden” that was having its opening next door at the Astor Theatre. The glitz of Hollywood and New York were in attendance at the gala black tie event. Sightings of this or that notable were passed along the grapevine as we nursed our drinks, but we wouldn’t know who they all were until the next morning papers came out. One message that shot around the counter we caught immedi-

ately: the tickets for the opening had sold out completely on the announcement that one of the big names in attendance would be Marilyn Monroe and she would be one of the usherettes. (Among the others, photographed lined up in the foyer beforehand, were Carol Channing, Denise Darcel and Margaret Truman, the President's daughter. Red Buttons seemed rather out of place at the far end.)

The other message being floated was that Marilyn would be attending the private party in the Astor Hotel's rooftop afterwards, going directly from the theater into the hotel and up in the elevator. The source also indicated that she would very likely come back down by elevator to the main lobby, then turn left to the 44th Street Exit and out to a waiting limo, which was already idling at the curb. Timing, of course, was of the essence. Who knew when she would emerge? About an hour after we learned the movie ended, we donned raincoats and braved the cold March winds of 44th Street. There was already a group circled around the side exit and out beyond the sidewalk, but police were keeping everyone well back from the doorway and the car.

Because we had used that door to leave, we needed only to slip to one side where there was a narrow ledge and slither along it, out of the way, but slightly above the crowd with a side view of the entry. The ledge was too narrow to sit on, so we stood up against the wall. No cops told us to leave.

It seemed an eternity, during which someone before us said that someone else had told her that when Monroe went up in the elevator from the theater the first time, she asked directions to the ladies' room. While there, several women who had followed her in another elevator, entered the ladies' room after her, queued up and sat in the stalls on either side, reaching under the divide with pens and scraps of paper asking for autographs. I told her I didn't believe that. At which her companion lifted a scrap from her pocket-book to show me, but it was too dark out to discern anything but a suggestion of a scrawl. I had a sickening feeling that was an invasion of privacy that simply standing on the sidewalk and gawking wasn't.

When the time came there was a discernible flurry of activity inside the foyer. From our vantage point all that could be seen at first was the front row of a cordon of very tall, very handsome policemen in uniform – New York's Finest, all gleaming – surround-

ing a shorter wavy platinum head that seemed almost spotlighted against their deep blue uniforms. They had escorted her down in the elevator. Seeing her finally emerge on the landing was breathtaking. Far back in the crowd there was yelling and waving. Those of us closer just stood with jaws dropped in silent awe. She wore a strapless white brocade gown that hugged her famous curves so tightly that when she moved past, it clung to her *gluteus maximus* and down the back of her thighs like a second skin. A single vertical slit from there down allowed her to take tiny mincing steps that gave bounce to the ounce up front. I wondered how she ever managed the bathroom business upstairs wrapped in such a cocoon. With long white gloves she clutched to her bosom a stole of the same material edged in beige fur, that barely covered her shoulders. It seemed terribly inadequate for the winds of March. But that kind of beauty knows no season, some poet or other wrote.

In the short flicker of time when she passed by us, I tried to recall what I knew of her recent activities: she and Joe DiMaggio had divorced; she was living briefly at the Waldorf and being squired around town by Marlon Brando, who had encouraged her to attend the Actors Studio, which she did twice a week (an actress friend, who was also studying there then, told me later that when Marilyn appeared, even “plain incognito”, with hair in rollers under a kerchief, an oversized bulky sweatshirt, no makeup and horn-rimmed glasses, she was the 800-pound gorilla in the room); and in 12 days hence she was scheduled to ride a pink elephant in Madison Square Garden, to the cheers of more thousands. We glimpsed her for only a moment, but that moment was indelible. The limousine door opened and one of the officers gently held her elbow and eased her into its depths. She blew him back a kiss through sensuously puckered pink lips and was gone. He dashed back to his cohorts like a teenager who had just made out with the homecoming queen, shouting, “I touched her. Did you see that? I TOUCHED her! Hot damn!” I walked Jay to his subway and then got on a downtown bus, woozy from voluptuous blonde aftershocks.

Following our brief encounter, she went on to form her own motion picture company in 1956, Marilyn Monroe Productions, that produced ‘Bus Stop’ and ‘The Prince and the Showgirl’ (with Sir Laurence Olivier). In the same year she married playwright Arthur Miller (distant thunder!). In 1959 she did ‘Some

Like it Hot' – my favorite of favorites –with Jack Lemon and Tony Curtis, and then 'The Misfits' in 1961, her last completed film. She and Miller parted. A year later, she died in her Brentwood, CA home of an apparent overdose. Troubled Norma Jeane Baker (1926 – 1962), was gone. But her alter ego, a fiction synonymous with beauty, sensuality, humor and effervescence survived and thrived as an American icon. That night outside the Astor Bar she touched me, too. Hot damn!

The Astor Hotel closed its doors for good in 1965. Once seen as the successor to the Waldorf – Astoria (that once occupied the block on Fifth Avenue between 33rd and 34th Streets, and was itself razed in 1929 in order to erect the Empire State Building), it was demolished the next year to make way for an anonymous 40-story office building that was more in keeping with the times: fast food, cheap cameras, cheesy souvenirs and cut-rate clothing emporia under sky high billboards blocking the sun. The elegant old Astor would have been an anomaly in such a setting. So, true to purpose, the more Times Square reinvented itself, the more it stayed the same – relevant only to the here and now. Not so its memories.

Billy got me to do it. I had only been to men's bath houses on two occasions in my life in New York – once in the Lower East Side and the other in Coney Island. Both were unpleasant experiences: dank, dark, ill lit and downright depressing. So when he urged me to consider going with him that Saturday night in late fall of 1972, I hesitated, but he assured me it was like nothing I'd ever expected and I'd be glad I went. In the end, I was.

He and I had been friends and neighbors in Greenwich Village for many years, but he was a good bit younger than I and more "street wise". He was always after me to go out more and "join the party". So we took the uptown express subway to 75th Street and walked back one block down Broadway to the elderly Ansonia Hotel, an overly decorated pile of limestone and marble that might have doubled as a Beaux-Arts wedding cake. Through a side entrance we descended into a unexpected subterranean fantasy world right out of ancient Rome – or at least a copycat Hollywood version starring Charlton Heston. It was startling.

Continental Baths had been created in 1968 by a wannabe opera singer from New Jersey named Steve Ostrow. His dream was to make it rival the ancient Baths of Caracalla in Rome itself (not the ruins, but the concept). Taking up the entire basement area of the hotel, it eventually included, besides gilded lockers and private cubicles with stone slab benches for reclining, several restaurants (modern cuisine), saunas and steam rooms (the most popular, but too hot for lingering long), plus workout spaces, showers and rub-down rooms with hot and cold running masseurs. The most outstanding feature, however, was an Olympic size swimming pool, whose cerulean blue depth sent refractions across the chandeliered ceiling and along walls decorated with copies of Pompeian art and sculpture. There was even a warning system that tipped off patrons, who might be otherwise occupied, when the fuzz showed up. (These baths, although widely known about, were still considered off limits legally.)

Bordering the pool all around was a wide marble-tiled lounge area replete with ample reclining deck chairs. It was considered *de rigueur* to have a white towel wrapped around the waist while lounging, and drop it on the floor before going in the water, the pool, following strict Roman custom, being for naked bodies only.

The towels came with the price of admission – \$10 for a locker and up, but in no time the Continental wipes had become so famous that even Bloomingdale’s department store began selling them with appropriate logos to all and sundry, for the *hoi poloi* to show one-up-manship at Jones Beach.

It was in the poolside lounge where Billy wanted us to reunite about 9 pm, towels intact. I wasn’t told why, but, on arriving and seeing so many already assembled Knights of the Wrap Around, I figured it was for something other than a lecture on personal hygiene. He was there and holding down a seat. The Continental was said to accommodate 1000 men, and it seemed that most of them were there. I repeatedly asked Billy what was going on, and he repeatedly told me to just wait and see. Meanwhile I watched the action in the pool, noticing at the far end a rather high and splashy waterfall under which swimmers cavorted and shrieked.

Before long a couple stage hands – in white towels – wheeled in a grand piano on the poolside opposite us. A microphone and speakers were set up and adjusted. With little fanfare, out bobbed a chunky little redhead who sashayed over to the crook of the piano, twirling the end of her revealing gown. The room went wild. She’d performed there for the last 8 weeks and was going to be held over for another 8. It was none other than Bette Midler, a ‘fur piece’ from Honolulu (where she was born in 1945) and preparing to perform in the most bizarre locale she could never have imagined.

I didn’t recognize her at first. It was the red hair. The last time I’d seen her was in 1965 when she was a dirty blonde (in more ways than one) and appearing in a Tom Eyen set of plays Off Off Broadway for a theater company my performing arts foundation was helping sponsor. One was *Miss Nefertiti Regrets* (with the emphasis on *titi*) and the other, *Cinderella Revisited* (unusual in that it had one script for the daytime kiddie audiences and another racier one for the night crowd). Since then she’d acted for 3 years in the road company of *Fiddler on the Roof*, in a bit part as one of the daughters. Steve Ostrow had decided to introduce cabaret to the baths, and before he was through, had brought in acts such as Melba Moore, The Pointer Sisters, Cab Calloway, John Davidson, Peter Allen and Manhattan Transfer. But Midler was the greatest sensation. She had developed a “symbiotic relationship with the guys at the Bath” (Ostrow), and it was really the beginning of her career as a nightclub entertainer. She admitted she honed her craft before

the audiences at “the tubs” (her phrase). By the evening we saw her act, she was a real pro, knocking the boys dead with her smutty patter, Mae West rolling eyes, and instant hits like her campy interpretations of ‘Chatanooga Choo Choo’, ‘Leader of the Pack’, and ‘Superstar’.

Her accompanist that night was Barry Manilow, who was recruited from the deck chairs and tickled the ivories clad only in his towel. He and she later teamed up for her first album on Atlantic Records, ‘The Divine Miss M’, that was recorded at the ‘tubs’. That hit album clinched that moniker for her everywhere but at the Continental where she was known as ‘Bathhouse Betty’ (although she insisted her first name be pronounced as one syllable, not like that Davis bitch). The two of them soon parted ways and it wasn’t until she lit up Las Vegas years later that a reconciliation of sorts was reached.

She took to wearing outlandish Carmen Miranda hats and gaudy costumes at her ‘tubs’ gigs, and polishing up her Yiddish-sprinkled repartee, which was always vulgar, but eventually presented with more finesse. She told off-color jokes that were as old as the Vaudeville of which she was an offshoot. She had a wicked temper. The night we caught her act, she stopped midway through ‘Chatanooga’ and shouted for some asshole to shut off the goddam waterfall. A guy in the next chair to mine whispered that she did that every show. It was her pet peeve. And added she was “all trash and flash”. He loved her. It was true that the younger fellows there, and they were the majority, really dug her style, and she seemed to reciprocate. One fan was Rudolf Nureyev, famed Russian defector dancer, who could be seen lolling on a deckchair (some said letting his towel slip) at many of her performances.

I frankly could take or leave her Sophie Tucker, Ethel Merman in-your-face belting, but had to admit she’d come a long way from the days when she was a teenage pineapple processor in her native Hawaii to being the Divine Miss M, superstar. More power to her.

As for the Continental Baths, I found it hard to believe what I read in 1973. Steve Ostrow, who had sung in a few of the shows he presented, always longed to be an opera singer at the Metropolitan Opera House nearby. So the next best thing was to try to cultivate a following of regular Met stars to perform there. By that time, café society had discovered the ‘tubs’ and wanted in. Before long couples, ladies and gents in evening dress could be found regularly

seated among the toweled regulars. The bathers in the pool still cavorted unclothed. The first Met diva who would stoop to perform there was soprano Eleanor Steber, who was said to have an antic sense of humor. (My prim Aunt Grace, who had sung duets with her when young, however, would have been appalled!) That afternoon while she was rehearsing, she insisted that the waterfall be shut off and the fellows in the pool remain quiet. When she started to sing, one wag noted it was so quiet you could hear a towel drop.

There was a large number of other opera singers and ‘glitterati’ attending that evening, along with many clicking flashbulbs. Steber had insisted it be billed as a formal “black towel” affair, and to great cheers from the pool, she strolled over to the piano and sailed through her serious repertoire of Mozart, Charpentier, and Puccini. The deafening applause at the end was as much for what she wore as what she sang: a beautiful chiffon gown, a glorious diamond necklace and – a black towel around her waist.

As time went on and more “outsiders” were allowed in to see the cabaret acts and view the naked landscape, those comprising that landscape began to resent being used as background filler, or as one defector put it, “If I wanted to traipse around naked in front an audience, I’d be in Burlesque and get paid for it.” It seemed to hark back to the 18th century when English aristocracy was invited in to witness the behavior of the insane in Bedlam Asylum. The bathers eventually migrated elsewhere, and that was the end of Continental Baths. Ostrow sold out to Plato’s Retreat. It was converted into a male / female sex club, and failed. All that remained after that was an abandoned ruin that resembled its beloved crumbling counterpart in Rome far more than was originally intended.

SOUNDS OF SILENTS

I first met Carl on the beach in Key West in 1965. We eyed each other from separate towels without speaking for a day or so, until fate found us behind each other waiting in line on the ramp up to the men's side of the circular cement toilet. Conversation continued when we got back to the water's edge, and lo and behold, we discovered we lived just around the corner from one another in Greenwich Village, and had for some time, yet didn't remember ever seeing each other in the neighborhood. Amazing. Small w....!

Returning to New York we began visiting back and forth, he and his partner Henry in their town house on Charles Street and my buddy Arthur and I in our first floor apartment on Waverly Place. Our common interests were varied, but travel dominated. Carl was defined by his interests. He had a passion for vintage cruise ships and he and Henry, a neurosurgeon, had been on many of the greatest by the time I got to know them. He had one of the most important and extensive collections of early cruise ship memorabilia, and he and I once shared a stateroom on the final – and unforgettable – return voyage of the Queen Mary from New York to Southampton, England. He was also an old-time-theater-organ buff and received regular notices of interest from the New York Theater Organ Society.

One day he called to say the NYTOS was sponsoring a gala evening commemorating the restitution and refurbishing of the moribund Wurlitzer at Beacon Theatre on May 9, 1967. Assuring me it would likely be quite special, I agreed to accompany him. I was not an aficionado per se, but played the piano and enjoyed organ music and had a small collection of Fauré and Bach recordings. When he found it was a black tie affair in orchestra only, we figured front row, first balcony seats were more our style. We could view the festivities from above while wearing street clothes. The notice suggested arriving at the theater early to tour the premises, which we did.

Beacon Theatre was on Broadway between 75th and 76th Streets. Its standard movie house marquee outside gave no indication of the splendor that awaited us. As soon as we pulled open the glittering bronze doors to the first floor lobby we could “feel” the class. It was designed by Walter Ahlshlager, who also designed the Roxy Theatre near Times Square. In fact it was originally meant to be a mini-Roxy, part of a chain, with the same design but only one

third the size. It opened on December 24, 1929, and from the start showed second run films or overflows of first runs playing the Roxy. In fact it was first named Roxy Midway. After the large Times Square area houses disappeared, including the Roxy, it was the largest surviving movie palace in the city. Traversing the white marble floors one entered the unusual oval lobby. The first indications of Moorish and Byzantine style throughout became evident, along with Art Deco chandeliers and side lights. A small rotunda off that boasted a beautiful central fountain with a marble statue of a nymph in the middle. It was obvious that those areas had been cleaned and polished to impress, because after pushing open more bronze doors we were in the main theater itself, and it seemed shrouded in a grey haze. True, after it was closed as a regular movie house, it was neglected for years, opened again sporadically for special film festivals and rock concerts (the acoustics were found to be perfect, and after 1989 was turned into a discotheque; Hilary Rodham Clinton's 60th birthday party was held there in 2007).

We decided on a tour of the inner theater at the ground level before finding our balcony seats. It was truly immense. The central dome rose eight stories above the floor. On the side walls were hardly discernible murals by Danish artist Vlademar Kjöldgaard, who also painted the somewhat brighter ones above the bronze exit doors in the lobby. The Byzantine/Moorish décor was more evident around the stage opening, that was oddly built at a slight angle to the audience because of the configuration of the building, the floor being wider on one side than the other. When it was used for rock concerts, it was difficult to get all the equipment through the stage door on the narrower side.

At each end of the stage were enormous fluted columns, flanked by golden statues of vaguely Hellenic goddesses wearing elaborate helmets and carrying spears. Carl thought they looked cheesy, but the spear theme was again incorporated with four longer, thicker ones – two on each side – rising four stories high to pierce the ends of a red striped, narrow tent running along the top of the stage opening, making it swoop out to form a protruded proscenium.

Beside the stage, in the corner of the theater, was the organ pit, enclosed by a golden 'contour curtain' that could be raised to form a high draped opening to frame the organist and organ after the lift brought them up above the heads of the seated audience. The or-

gan, on preliminary view at the moment, was a work of art in itself: a mighty Wurlitzer boasting four manuals and 19 ranks, gleamingly lit up like a glorious pinball machine. An expert was on hand to elaborate. It had an electro-pneumatic action and the pipe chambers were high above the stage and ‘spoke’ out to the steep balconies, leaving a long interval for the sound to get back down to the organist’s ears. So they had to be trained to play with their eyes and listen with their ears in stop-time intervals.

The expert, a genial former organist who had worked at the theater, explained that several like him worked there regularly, in gigs of two weeks at a time. They played as audiences arrived, then during intermissions between 8 and 9pm, and finally at the movies’ end. With so much free time in between, it was tempting to frequent the local pubs. It was the downfall for some. Also, as time went on, the theater became increasingly dilapidated, and it was common to open up the organ cover to find occasional cockroaches tickling the keys or crawling down the cracks. But, he said, the hardest job in the theater was that of the projectionists. Lugging heavy film canisters, they had to climb every few hours up to the 2nd balcony to get to the projection booth, and more often when anything went wrong. It was cramped, hot and scary up there.

The theater was beginning to fill up, and another organist arrived, in white tie and tails, to hop into the ‘saddle’. Carl and I fought our way back against the current and climbed to our front row balcony perch. The view from above was really something, with arriving theatergoers being serenaded by the tail-coated organist’s deft renditions of standard skating rink favorites with a few dexterous *arpeggio* flourishes to demonstrate the sound of the refurbished Wurlitzer. The hall from there looked immense, with the unusual ‘tent’ proscenium reaching out and enticing you to come on under it and see the show. When the hall was nearly full, he switched to movie music. When he got to *Tico, Tico*, from the film ‘Bathing Beauty’ starring Esther Williams and Red Skelton, I felt an almost tearful jerk at the heart strings. The film came out in 1944 at the height of World War II. I was a susceptible star struck teenager, and when organist Ethel Smith slid onto the bench of her white Hammond B-3 electric organ (designed especially for her, I recalled, with its left leg removed so she could easily mount it in a slinky Adrian of Hollywood gown), then hiked the skirt up over her knees and began playing *Tico, Tico*, with spike heels skittering

dizzily all over the foot pedals, I felt I was in Show Biz heaven. Sitting up there in the Beacon balcony, I could still see her smiling out at me without once looking at the keys, in an upswept hairdo so popular in the war years, with both sides piled high on her head to form the top half of a fat valentine heart.

Carl stopped my daydreaming over the rail with a tap on the shoulder and pointed to a fellow walking across the empty stage to a microphone. The music stopped. It was the president of the NYTOS, welcoming us to the auspicious program. It was a tribute, not only to the Wurlitzer, but also to the two silent films starring Gloria Swanson that were going to be shown: 'Queen Kelly' from 1929 and 'The Trespasser' from a year later. He added that the NYTOS had commissioned a new organ score for 'Queen Kelly' by one of the most famous current movie composers, Lee Erwin (1908-2000), who had kindly consented to play it while we viewed the picture. The balding, smiling Erwin, in owl-rimmed glasses, came out for a bow, then made his way over to the Wurlitzer. (He would be commissioned later to do several dozen more new scores for vintage silents.) And now, ladies and gentlemen, the amplified voice intoned, the surprise guest of the evening long pause.... Miss Gloria Swanson.... in the flesh! Let's give her a big hand, ladies and gentlemen!

The theater erupted in a noisy, standing ovation that lasted long after the tiny figure had stepped out from the wings in a loose blue caftan, her left hand holding a single rose by its long stem, and minced her way to center stage. Through Carl's opera glasses, she seemed to be carrying her 70 years well. Her hair was parted in the middle and the straight sides and back were turned under in a soft pageboy, with long earrings pendant. Her renowned defiant toothy smile, with corners turned down, was intact. She raised her right arm in high acknowledgement. The amazing thing, I marveled, was that we were witnessing the embodiment of the entire history of film in America encapsulated in that little caftan. She was just under 5 foot tall and considered by many in the know, the best actress of that era. Born Gloria May Josephine Svensson, in 1897, her formative years were spent traveling from place to place in a military family. She attended over a dozen schools as a child, from her native Chicago to Haiti, to Key West, and so on. She possessed a lovely singing voice that her mother urged her to develop. That early training might have been what allowed her to successfully

overcome the transition from silents to talkies, while other equally famous co-stars – like Rudolph Valentino, who had a high fruity voice – were laughed into oblivion.

Swanson broke into movies in bit parts, mostly comedy or slapstick, which she hated, in studios like Mack Sennett's Keystone. She was 'discovered' in 1919 by Cecil B. deMille of Famous Players-Lasky, who took her under his wing and developed her dramatic potential. She appeared in over a dozen films before 'Queen Kelly', even posing dead beside a live lion in its den in 'Male and Female'. Her lifestyle became the paradigm for most future Hollywood denizens. She was the highest paid female in films in the 1920s, making \$250,000 dollars a week, most of which she splurged on mansions, swimming pools, vehicles and expensive wardrobes. She became a fashion icon. She also spent a fortune on productions in which she appeared – 'Queen Kelly' and 'The Trespasser' being prime examples. She eventually married seven times, first briefly to Wallace Beery, and somewhere in the middle, to a marquis. Her lover during many of those years was Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr. (She was to note, on publishing her autobiography years later, "Age, if nothing else, entitles me to set the record straight before I dissolve. I've given my memoirs far more thought than any of my marriages. You can't divorce a book.").

So there she stood before us – the high camp goddess of the silver screen, well along in years, taking up the space of a dot on the vast empty Beacon stage, and about to hold forth on two of her most successful projects. We leaned in closer. 'Queen Kelly', from 1929, was one of her best films. It was also Erich von Stroheim's final stab at directing. The lighting and photography were superb even by later standards. The story line, however, was something else again:

A young innocent convent girl named Patricia Kelly meets the prince of her dreams (Wolfram) while out with the nuns. He is on forced maneuvers as punishment for playing around with other women, by the mad Queen Regina of Kronberg, to whom he is betrothed. After a risqué scene involving other soldiers and her bloomers that didn't make any sense with the plot, Prince Wolfram kidnaps Kelly that night from the convent and takes her to his chambers in the palace. The wretched queen discovers them *in flagrante* and the next morning, rains down her terror on poor Kelly and throws her out of the kingdom, roaring (silently of course) that

the prince is ‘MINE! MINE! MINE!’ That scene, in which an older actress practically chews up the scenery in her madness, whips Kelly and throws her out of the palace, is the hysterically funny moment of the film. And high camp. Back in the convent again, bruised and battered, Kelly prays to the Virgin to let her see her precious prince again.

That was Part I. The film is in two parts. The second half concerns Kelly’s fortunes thereafter. She learns her ailing aunt in German East Africa (yes!) needs her desperately. She finds out when she gets there that her aunt really runs a brothel, and, of course, poor Kelly ends up working there. The aunt insists she promise to wed a down and out crippled drunk named Jan. Kelly refuses, just as her aunt dies (don’t ask). At about that time in the filming, Swanson explained to us, she stopped production. She didn’t like the direction it was going, telling us she misunderstood the script. She thought it was supposed to be a dance hall, not a brothel, and the business woman in her told her the American public wouldn’t buy it. In 1931 she directed, and Greg Toland filmed the rest, called the “Swanson Ending”. Kelly dies (we don’t know how) and her body is returned to the nunnery chapel to lie in state. Another nun leads Prince Wolfram in to see her, and he falls on his knees weeping.

The film was never released in the United States until years later, but was shown in Europe and South America, where audiences were presumably more tolerant of the racier scenes. Example: while Wolfram and fellow soldier Fritz are galloping past two young women on the street, one girl yells ‘Come on, wild Wolfram. I’d bet my nightie on you!’ The other girl shouts, “Come on, Fritz! She hasn’t GOT a nightie!”

Swanson explained we would be seeing the finished product, including the ‘Swanson Ending’, and walked decorously to the side of the stage as the movie screen was lowered. Organist Lee Erwin was signaled to start playing, and before long we were caught up in the improbable tale. The mighty Wurlitzer swooped and snarled, twittered like birds, made thunder and tenderly pulled at heart-strings with pulsating funereal tones. The music was incredibly apt at conveying all Kelly’s emotions. It was clear how important the organ was to early silents, much as orchestral music became essential to every later film. It reminded us that we were there mainly to honor the revitalized Wurlitzer, that performed splendidly. Erwin’s

Erwin's composition was a lush reminder.

The second film shown that evening was 'The Trespasser'. Aside from netting Swanson an Academy Award nomination, it was also a transitional film from silent to talkie, directed in 1929 by Edmund Goulding. There were problems with that movie and director also, but Swanson didn't elucidate. Again, she took over the reins to keep from losing the money on it she had invested (she and lover Joseph P. Kennedy, who wanted desperately to be a producer). Basically it was a star vehicle about a kept woman who maintains a lavish lifestyle with help from her lover. Swanson managed to look gorgeous throughout in outfit after outfit, many featuring feather fans and just-above-the-eyebrows pearl encrusted "headachers, and showed she had mastered the 'look of horror' and submissive dipping of eyelashes requisite for female success in all silent films.

When the houselights went up after that showing, Gloria returned to center stage for a final question and answer. Aside from personal questions, like how many children she had (two daughters and one adopted son), most were about her comeback film after a long absence, 'Sunset Boulevard' in 1950, with William Holden and directed by Billy Wilder. Was it based on her own life story? No, no, no, was her emphatic response. Mae West had been asked first to do the role of Norma Desmond, followed by a long line of other decliners, including Pola Negri and Mary Pickford, before Swanson agreed to it. It helped that the script included Erich von Stroheim as her former husband, director and butler. Was the murder of Holden poolside at the end reminiscent of any incidents in her own career? No, no, no again!

"I've got NOBODY floating in my swimming pool."

Gloria Swanson bade adieu with a wave of her long stemmed rose and exited. Carl was the first to rise for the standing ovation. Trailing behind her could almost be seen the ghosts of all the other long ago legends of the silver screen that she embodied. As we left, another organist at the Wurlitzer played Leroy Anderson's snappy 'Fiddle-Faddle', which had special resonance for me. My mother told me as a child, listening to his music on the radio, that if she hadn't married my father, it'd probably have been Leroy. They sang together in the junior choir at the Swedish Evangelical church in Arlington, Mass., and he had a crush on her. Obviously they had both moved on. Fiddle-Faddle, indeed.

STILL (ER) WATERS RUN DEEP

Glancing through the Sunday New York Times in March, 2010, some time near the solstice, I was suddenly confronted by a full page color ad for the movie 'Greenberg' showing its star, Ben Stiller, walking toward me on a road. It was clear that, at 45, he was a full fledged Hollywood star: almost handsome, with straight nose and well arched eyebrows and a full head of dark hair. But the head was slightly too big for his small body, giving him a slightly top heavy appearance, and that might have been one reason for his meteoric rise to fame as a comedic actor that began with the film, 'There's Something About Mary', about adolescent coming of age, in 1998.

His latest TV appearance had been earlier in March, 2010 at the Academy Awards Ceremony in Los Angeles. Presenting the Oscar for sci-fi or special effects or whatever, he approached from the backlit stage as a black silhouette, and when he reached the microphone, his face was suddenly lit by a bright spot— and it was green! Coming out of his ears were weird things and out of his hair spiky other weird things. It was off-putting, more than a little macabre, but still funny. And that spoke volumes about his talent. It came naturally.

He was the son of Stiller & Meara – Jerry Stiller, born in 1927, and Anne Meara, in 1929 – who linked up as a married couple in 1954, and a comedy duo around 1959. Stiller, short, squat and Jewish, and Meara, tall, skinny and Irish Catholic, used that as a basis for their *shtick*, classy improvisational routines that began in an obscure Greenwich Village club and moved on to the Blue Angel night spot uptown, and then countrywide, being invited back to appear on the Ed Sullivan TV Show 36 times. Like Elaine May and Mike Nichols, they honed their craft by joining the Compass Players (later to become Second City).

But times had changed by the mid 70s, and comedy duos were no longer in such great demand. True troopers, Stiller and Meara split up as performing partners, but remained married and had two children, Ben and Amy (who also became a comedy performer and writer and created with her father some of the funniest radio commercials ever aired, including my favorite, a series for Blue Nun Wine). Jerry went into TV situation comedy playing unforgettable roles like Frank Castanza's father on 'Seinfeld' and then 'King of

Queens'. Anne appeared in 'Archie Bunker's Place', but eventually went on to write successful plays like 'The Other Woman' (1983) and co-authored 'After-Play' (1995). Their years in show business were rewarded by a joint star of recognition on Hollywood's Walk of Fame in 2007.

Some time, amid all that, the family managed to find its way to Nantucket Island and, like me, bought a house for a summer 'get away'. Theirs was at Children's Beach on the harbor, mine on the other side of town. But we occasionally sunbathed on the same small strip of sand west of Brant Point Lighthouse. Its proximity to the deep channel where ferries plied back and forth to the mainland, made for potentially hazardous swimming far out, so it remained quite secluded. Even at the height of the season, there was almost always a place to spread a towel and dabble at water's edge, or sit watching Sunday sailing regattas rounding the Point to the Sound. (Sitting there we often thought how great it would be to be able to dive far under and scoop up all the coins that had accumulated on the bottom around the Lighthouse – said to be the second oldest in the USA after Boston and a target for a century's worth of good luck pennies tossed from decks of passing vessels by wistful little hands.)

On one such afternoon just after Labor Day in 1973, Arthur and I found a spot over near the wide spread of *rosa rugosa* bushes marking the beach's far end, their hips reddening nicely and thorny stems guaranteeing no interlopers onto our turf from that direction. Ten feet behind us was a solitary tall metal mesh trash basket, full to overflowing from the holiday crowd. Propped up against its shade-lending side and under a floppy hat sat Anne Meara, reading. She looked up, we all said hi, and she became engrossed again. We knew each other by sight – she had occasionally come into my wharf gallery, and Arthur had shared a cigarette with her one night outside The Ship's Inn, but we weren't close. We settled our towels and went to try the water. Typical of Nantucket it was frigid through most of the summer, and warmed to merely cold in fall. It was fall and merely cold.

When we got back to our towels, Meara lowered her book and suddenly went into a tirade about amounts of trash she'd collected from around her and stuffed in the bin, berating the tourists and the times. Did everyone live in pig sties these days? What had happened to moral values in our country? Maybe there should be more

trash bins in the world! We nodded, dumbly sympathetic until she ran out of expletives and stuck her nose back in the book again. We sat down facing the bay, hearing an occasional faint curse behind us as she continued fomenting inwardly.

It wasn't long before Ben and Jerry showed up carrying snorkeling gear. They all but ignored her as they trudged doggedly past to the wet sand below and dropped their burdens. They were men on a mission, in bathing trunks. Ben was a curly haired, eager looking seven or eight year old, circling around his dad like a puppy as Jerry wisecracked his way through donning the flippers and goggles, talking loudly and playing to the balcony – us. He was about to give little Ben a demonstration, but first he had to pretend to mistakenly fit the flippers on his hands like mitts and lunge at the boy with arms raised menacingly. The kid was loving it.

Finally Jerry eased his girth into the briny, adjusting the goggles and tube and playfully slapping back spray at his son. It took a while to get accustomed to the water, which he did by short squats, down and out, until he was in up to his neck. His head bobbed about like it was severed for a while, spewing water out like a fountain. Then after a few more dunks, he got serious and mumbled into the snorkel that he was going down for real. He had Ben count to three and disappeared, with only the yellow snorkel end to indicate his whereabouts. It darted about in the ripples as if attached to a drunken submarine, and then fell completely out of sight.

Ben frantically ran back and forth at water's edge, yelling 'Daddy, Daddy, Daddy'. We sat up and scanned the horizon ourselves, with no sign of Jerry. He seemed to be under an inordinately long time. I looked back at Anne who gave a who-knows? shrug. Just as I was about to get up myself and go to the lighthouse for help, Jerry emerged, further along the coast than we expected. He heaved out of the surf, huffing and spewing, and beached himself on his belly, Ben ran to him, jumping up and down and screaming, 'Daddy, Daddy, what are you doing? What are you doing?'

Jerry raised his head and bellowed, "I'm trying to drown myself, stupid. What did you think I'm doing?" Ben knelt down and hugged his father's neck tightly for a long time. All was well again.

I looked back at Meara. She squinted over her horn rims, flicked a cigarette ash aside, and, shaking her head in mock derision,

shaking her head in mock derision, croaked, ‘Those two!’

* * * * *

Fast forwarding to the 1990s, another water event involving Stiller and Meara occurred at the Gordon Folger Hotel on Easton Street. The grand old behemoth was built in 1891 by Elijah Alley and initially named Point Breeze. (After many a summer as the Gordon Folger, in 2008 it was renovated throughout its 40 odd rooms and garret quarters under the roof, along with the 4-story square turret at the southeast corner overlooking the bay, and re-named the Point Breeze again). Early modern features were its own generating plant and private telephone service. The vast shingled hulk, with a 60-foot long raised porch across the front, was the setting over the years for many local functions. Its ballroom was the largest in Nantucket and could accommodate 250 persons, as could its vast downstairs lobby where a meeting of townspeople had got under way to discuss a very pressing and persistent current topic –water pollution.

Seated casually and comfortably on worn cretonne covered armchairs, porch rockers and fold-ups borrowed from the separate restaurant building next door, a goodly number of those concerned citizens in attendance owned houses on or near Children’s Beach – as did Stiller and Meara. The problem was not only bilge and sludge that collected in the snug little cove after a season’s mooring of numerous small craft, but also the disquieting factor of more and more visitors invading the area’s semi-privacy and leaving behind all matter of ugly trash scattered like confetti across the lawns.

Jerry Stiller, Anne Meara and I had been there before, occupying much the same mismatched chairs. It was at an open house Bahá’i gathering to introduce the teachings of its Persian religious founder Bahá’u’lláh and the movement. Many there, like myself, were seeking respite from the gnawing anxieties and vagaries of modern life. After briefly discussing a neophyte’s expectations and explaining the sect’s prime emphasis on one-world religion, the butch speaker in jeans checked her muscular wristwatch and turned the session over to questions. Several people raised valid ones on theory and meaning. I raised my hand and said, as an artist, I wondered if adherence to any ism might cripple my need to be openly

and freely creative. At that, Jerry spoke up and said that he and Anne had been members for years and it never hampered their creativity. I replied that I didn't think actors were creative artists, but interpreters of a playwright's creativity. That led to a back and forth tennis match of raised voices and incrimination, with Anne lobbing a few fast balls at the net as well. The leader calmed us down and in answer to me, said that each of us must seek solace in his or her own way, but the teachings of Bahá'í might offer meaningful road maps for the journey. (Thank you, Mary Baker Eddy.) It wasn't until I was later involved with my own performing arts foundation that I realized I was not only being elitist, I was also dead wrong. Thornton Wilder ("Our Town") had summed it up succinctly back in a 1955 newspaper interview: "Many plays – certainly mine – are like blank checks. The actors and directors put their signatures on them." End of debate.

But back to the gathering at hand. The majority of home owners there were rather staid New Englanders who were used to speaking their minds mildly. Soft adjectives were floated, like fecal, brackish, excretal, smelly, nasty, and despicable when describing the hydrous emissions from their faucets. No one seemed to pinpoint the problem clearly enough to get beyond it. Out of utter frustration, Anne Meara stood and said, "Look, everybody, let's face it. What we're talking about here is SHIT." To mix metaphors, that was the thing that broke the ice. The other participants collapsed in peals of laughter, slapping knees and beating chests, and before long came up with the necessary proposals to take to the town selectmen at their next meeting. By winter, the water problem was solved – until next time.

* * * * *

For the third watery tale involving the team of Stiller and Meara, it is necessary to backtrack to the early 1960s. The setting was the Mad Hatter Restaurant, down the block and across the street from the Gordon Folger. It sat squarely and low-browed on the corner lot surrounded by lawn and shrubbery. (Several decades later there would be the addition of a large innovative scrap metal sculpture of the Mad Hatter's head and tall pockmarked accouterment – a real stove pipe – emerging from the grass. My friend, the framer/artist Brad Brooks was commissioned to create it, and it

soon became a popular landmark and the Everest every youngster passing by felt compelled to conquer.)

The interior of the restaurant was roomy but arranged into intimate seating areas. The ceilings were low and the lighting soft. A unique feature was that the menus were chalked on blackboards and brought tableside on easels. Most of the wait staff in summer were college students, supervised by year-round pros, who shunned the blackboards in favor of confronting guests directly with ‘Good evening. I am your menu’, and then rattling off lists that no one remembered.

The current owners we will call Gus and Andy to protect their memories. They were constantly fighting – sometimes physically – with Andy, who was supposed to be the manager, invariably stomping off upstairs to their quarters to nurse a bruised ego, leaving his job to the senior waiter.

Gus, on the other hand was never far from the kitchen where he was the chef. Tall and burly, he was imposingly athletic. Just the sight of his white eminence barreling into the dining room to quell one disturbance or other was enough to turn antagonists into bleating sheep. He was a tyrant in the kitchen also, but possessed of a wicked wit and wild imagination that found their way permanently into the annals of local dining out legends, like the one that follows:

Stiller and Meara arrived with a group of theater colleagues from New York they’d invited to the island for a weekend. They occupied two big tables thrown together for the occasion in an almost direct line to the kitchen’s swinging doors with their signature porthole windows. It took two wait staff with blackboards to accommodate the new comers. One of those newcomers was a young *ingénue* who had obviously not dined out in style very frequently. When the slate was turned toward her, she peered at the listings carefully, pausing at the last one that read: Fish *du Jour*. What was Fish *du Jour*? She wanted to know. Fish of the day, she was told. What kind? Cod. She really wanted it, but...was it fresh? The waitress was slightly befuddled. She was new there herself and hadn’t been asked that question yet. She said she would go back to the kitchen and ask. The others around the table watched, amused by the innocence in their midst, but said nothing.

When the novice waitress asked Gus the question, his face red-

dened at such stupidity. He told her to point out which table it was. Through the portholes she indicated the large double party opposite.

'My god,' he said, wiping sweat from his brow, 'Is that Stiller and Meara out there?' She had no idea who they were.

'It is, I know it is. That damned Annie Meara, I'll show her'. He told her to go back and take the rest of the orders and tell the innocent young thing it's the freshest fish she ever ate. After she brought them back, he got busy, allotting food dishes to the *sous* chef and staff, while he called Andy upstairs to get out his scuba gear, flippers, goggles and snorkel, and bring them down the back stairs to the staff's outdoor trestle table in the rear. He admonished everybody to keep mum about it.

When all the food was prepared, the dishes were covered and kept warm while he and a couple dishwashers slipped out the back door and got him into the wetsuit, flippers, etc. Pulling on the hood and adjusting the goggles, he had the boys attach a hose to the outside spigot, turn it on full, and dowse him all over with water, turning round and round several times. Assured he was thoroughly soaked, they helped him back up into the kitchen, adjusted the flippers and gloves, mask and snorkel, while others set out some of the dishes on the largest serving tray available. The waiters would bring up the rear with the rest.

Gus had to be led to the swinging doors and handed the tray. He burst through them into the dining room like a Martian monster and made a bee-line for the Stiller-Meara table. At first scared silly, when they got the joke, the entire room erupted in a spontaneous standing ovation. What a performance! Gus circled two or three times around their table, shaking water on everyone, especially Meara, who, in hysterics, was half under the table with her other guests. When he reached the *ingénue*, whose hair was slicked to her head from his sprinkling, he pushed up the mask and growled,

'Girlie, you ain't NEVER goin' t' get fish any fresher'n THAT! And doan choo forgit it'

With a last flick of spray he returned whence he came. Applause!

Amidst all the hoopla, none of them even noticed that all their meals had gone stone cold.

MARGARITAVILLE

Midsummer, 1958. By late afternoon, the Zócalo, or town square of Taxco had emptied. The tourists, who had arrived by noon and bought all the silver jewelry the region was famous for, were on their buses back over the tortuous snaking road that took 5 hours to Mexico City, or south over more snaking roads through the mountains to Acapulco. The isolated little village, at 5,200 feet above sea level, was almost half way between them. It had been returned, temporarily, to the Indians.

There were enough *gringos* left behind, however – permanent retirees in splendid haciendas hidden away in the surrounding range – to begin filling up the few bars around the plaza for their ritual cocktail hour. Dona Margarita's was the most popular, if for no other reason than it was there that the world famous *margarita* drink was supposed to have originated. A potent mixture of tequila, lime and salt, it also made for a heady photo op to show a couple perched on the overhead balcony sipping them with forearms entwined. Anything to make the folks back home envious. Erroneously, some believed that Jimmy Buffett, the American pop singer, was the drink's originator because of his famed bar on Duval Street in Key West, Florida, called 'Margaritaville', but Jimmy was a Johnny-come-lately to it.

Around that time of day, an energetic little figure of a woman could usually be seen crossing the Zócalo, dressed like a Spanish flamenco dancer in flounce after flounce of white lace petticoats under a full black skirt embroidered with sequined native motifs that caught fiery glints off the setting sun as she passed. Her raven hair, that took half a day for her ever-present Indian *mucama* to comb into one luxuriant braid intertwined with colorful strands of yarn and beads, reached down her back to below the belt. A puff-sleeved white peasant blouse was topped by turquoise and silver necklaces, enhancing a face more pert than pretty. On both wrists big silver bangles clinked as she waved to acquaintances emerging from vespers at the centuries-old Santa Prisca Church, whose pink baroque façade and towers dominated the east end of the plaza. Tap-tapping purposefully across the plaza tiles were her bright red high heeled shoes. Forever forty, she was a five-foot tall irrepressible dynamo.

It was not an apparition onlookers saw, or a fancy dancer heading for a performance. It was Margarita Figueroa, the town's most

prominent (self appointed) socialite, and, as another legend claimed, for whom the cocktail was really named. She always dressed like that. It was the bait that lured the famous and important visitors in Taxco to her cocktail parties and evening candlelight suppers at the once grand Casa Figueroa just off the square. Her brother, Fidel Figueroa, whose duty it was to maintain the remarkable landmark 'palace', often acted as host to her hostess. She boasted that they had entertained every major celebrity that had visited Taxco for twenty years. It was a passionate avocation. Nobody doubted her.

Margarita claimed to be descended from Spanish ancestry, but admitted to a few early native intruders in a lineage that she traced back to Hernán Cortés' arrival in Taxco in the early 1500s to extract silver from its plentiful mines. Not well educated herself, but with a sharp mind and memory, a sense of humor about herself and her world, and a flair for creating unique fashions that incorporated ancient Zapotecan designs, she was the darling of the local *haut monde*, such as it was. (Some time later she would even marry a painter from Wisconsin, Howard Leigh, who was instrumental in forming an influential organization, *Junta Cultural Zapoteca*, for the preservation of Indian heritage).

It looked to me as if she was heading in the direction of the Hotel Santa Prisca, the place I had called home for a number of previous summers. I would have to ask Fred Clapp, the owner, what noted personage he was expecting that would qualify for an invitation in person. I was certainly not on any of her lists, being merely an anonymous fly on the wall artist, there to sketch and record aspects of Mexican life to be translated later into full scale paintings. Life for me was so much simpler that way: at 27, I was free to eat whatever when I wanted, drink whatever, whenever, and wear anything anywhere.

My quarters were, like all the rooms, off a large tiled central patio with clusters of banana trees and jungle foliage allowing privacy in front of individual doorways. Like every other building in town, the outer walls were whitewashed and roofs covered with terra cotta tiles. At the opposite end of my room beyond the beds were double doors opening onto a private balcony with a breathtaking view up and down the mountainside. Those blue doors had to be closed most nights against the chill that set in after sundown. But also to block out the insistent all-night barking and howling of

hundreds of wild dogs living in the remote upper regions. When visitors experienced it the first night of their stay, they didn't know how they could put up with it again. And yet, surprisingly, one got so used to it after several nights, it was no more bothersome than a pendulum clock in the parlor.

By the time I had gathered up my sketchbook and pencils to follow her to the hotel, she had already given her invitation for supper that evening and left, saying she would send her man Juan to pick up the guest about 7:30. I found Fred, the genial potbellied owner/-manager in his 'native' *guayabera* tunic (though he was a pale-faced Yankee), seated near the entrance in the tiny coffee shop that I had recently painted Dufy-style murals on to liven it up (for which I was given a month's free room and board). I asked who the celebrity was. He answered some writer named Wilder.

"Thornton Wilder?" I asked. He guessed so. He obviously wasn't very literary minded or he would have known (as Margarita surely discovered) that at the time Thornton Wilder was considered one of the leading author/playwrights in the States. He had won three Pulitzer Prizes by then: in 1928 for the best-selling novel, 'The Bridge of San Luis Rey', an examination by a friar in 18th century Peru about the lives of five disparate people who happen to be on the bridge when it collapses, sending them all to their deaths; in 1938 for the play 'Our Town' (discussed below); and in 1943 for another hit play, 'The Skin of Our Teeth', about the tumultuous life of the Cantrobust family, that starred Frederic March, Tallulah Bankhead and the 23-year old Montgomery Clift (who was to become one of Wilder's closest friends), in which he mingled style and forms daringly. Another of his plays, 'The Merchant of Yonkers' failed in 1938, but after some rewriting and a change of name to 'The Matchmaker', in 1954 it became a huge success on Broadway starring Ruth Gordon.

A little side story about Ruth Gordon years later: she and her then husband Garson Kanin were seated beside me in the front row of an experimental theater piece my new foundation was helping to sponsor. Her head kept nodding and falling onto my shoulder. I didn't dare breathe. But as soon as applause erupted anytime, she awake, sat up and applauded lustily, then dropped off against me until the next applause. When the piece ended, she was the first to jump up to a standing ovation, shouting 'Good Show! Good Show!' As I helped her with her coat, she whispered in an inimitable aside, 'It ain't no Matchmaker, hon!'

‘The Matchmaker’, like a nine-lived cat, metamorphosed in 1969 into the mega-hit musical ‘Hello Dolly!’, starring Carol Channing with music by Jerry Herman (owner of one of my early paintings).

Wilder was born in 1897 in Madison, Wisconsin, into a very strict Congregationalist family that included three sisters and another brother who became a religious academician. Early on his father became the U.S. Consul General of China and moved the entire family there. Thornton attended the English China Inland Mission School in Chefoo, but returned with his mother and sisters to live in California because of the unstable political atmosphere in the Orient.

He went on to study at Yale in 1917, then returned after a stint in World War I with the First Coast Artillery in Rhode Island, and published his first play, ‘The Trumpet Shall Sound’ in the Yale Literary Magazine. In 1921 he went to the American Academy in Rome, then returned to get his master’s at Princeton. It was there he published his first novel, ‘The Cabala’, about 18th century Peru before the best selling ‘The Bridge of San Luis Rey’. He taught at the University of Chicago from 1930 to 1936, and later at the University of Hawaii. In World War II he served in Africa and Italy.

His most important legacy, if he was remembered for nothing else, was ‘Our Town’, probably the most popular and enduring American play of all time. Not a year went by that it wasn’t produced some place or other. It was translated into many languages to be played worldwide. I appeared in it with the Medway Players in high school, and he even acted in it himself during his lifetime, playing the role of The Stage Manager for a few weeks on Broadway and again in summer stock in places like Cohasset on Cape Cod and Williamstown, MA. His dear friend and lifelong correspondent, Gertrude Stein, gave him the idea from her work, ‘Making of Americans’, and he was also influenced by the works of the Italian playwright Pirandello. Its setting is Grover’s Corners (after a visit to Peterborough, N.H. in the 1920s), and it tells of life, love and death in a small American town. The out-of-town reviews for it in 1938 were not thrilling. But when it opened in New York, its leading critic called it ‘hauntingly beautiful’. It was actually the first major experimental work produced in a commercial setting, and its impact was profound and far reaching. It is meant to be presented on a bare stage throughout with only props such as fold-

ing chairs, ladders, umbrellas, and, in the last act, tombstones, carried on by the actors. There are numerous characters, all, even those with only a few lines, having names and identities. Costumes can be whatever the director wishes, although it is set in rural America in the 1920s and should reflect that. The very simplicity of the staging and the fact that not all the actors needed professional training, allowing it to be performed almost anywhere – and so it has always been. Most experts and historians agreed that theater in the United States could never have been the same without it.

Wilder suffered a writer's block after the second act, and wasn't able to finish the third until Stein, in a bizarre but effective move, teamed him up with one Samuel Steward in Paris. Steward was a sometime writer, sometime pornographer, occasional tattoo artist, and all around weirdo, who lured Wilder away to Zurich. It was a disastrous connection, but one in which he was able to successfully complete the play.

There was no point in my telling Fred Clapp in Taxco all the details of Thornton Wilder's biography. So I just told him he was an eminent literary figure and let it go at that. Wilder had arrived that morning and when I made my way across the patio, I found him seated just outside the room next to mine. We exchanged hellos and I plunked down in the seat beside him, dropping my art paraphernalia on the floor. He showed interest in what I'd been sketching, so I handed him the sketchbook, which he thumbed through as we talked. He was very pleasant and friendly, round-headed, bald, rather pear-shaped it seemed, and wearing dark rimmed spectacles that partially obscured his main distinguishing feature – thick black eyebrows. He also seemed to be cultivating a most anemic excuse for a moustache. Wearing a shirt and tie, in that climate!, with a suit jacket folded over his chair back, he resembled almost any amiable middle-aged banker. He was 61.

We found we were both inveterate travelers and exchanged a few anecdotes – his more exotic than mine since I hadn't the years yet to accrue much. His voice was soft and not intrusive. I described some of the scenes of Taxco in the book he was riffling. He had never been there before, but was in Mexico City with time to spare and hired a driver. He had no idea it would be that long a trip and he had to return the next day. He was tired and not anxious to attend a party in his honor by someone he didn't know. I told him he would find Margarita Figueroa quite an experience. Before we

knew it we had switched from travel to our adolescence, that ended up having parallels as well, in spite of our age differential.

His, after China, was spent in California. His mother, who wasn't as strict as his father, encouraged him and his siblings to enjoy things like music, writing and especially the theater. (All of his sisters became writers and poets like her, and his brother would become head of the Divinity School at Harvard and a well-known poet). He always felt an outsider at school. Not interested or fit for sports, he spent all his free time in libraries, or, after his mother's encouragement, at theater productions. He told of one incident he never forgot: He had a chance to play the part (in drag) of Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's 'The Importance of Being Ernest'. He wrote his father in Hong Kong for permission. The elder replied he didn't think it right to participate in such an activity at that time. Thornton wrote back asking his father to please let him know when it *was* the right time. He never heard and felt permanently damaged by it.

I was a loner too, with no interest in sports either. But my corresponding experience ended quite differently, I told him. I wanted to appear in one of our school's yearly minstrel shows as a kind of exotic Carmen Miranda dancer, the only time in my life I ever dressed in full drag, including platform shoes and fruity headdress. I asked my father for his thoughts. He had his own kind of firm religious scruples, and I expected a flat refusal. Instead he looked up from his paper, thought a moment and said, 'Well, you'll make a good one.' I never forgot that either. Drag was a liberating experience, but didn't need repeating.

It grew dark. The tin lanterns were being lit around the patio and Margarita's manservant arrived. Wilder shook my hand, bade goodbye, I thought reluctantly, and followed him out. A dear man, I never saw him again. But in the middle of the night I was awakened by the sounds of moaning, retching and flushing next door. I thought of going to him, but realized it could be embarrassing. Margaritaville might have been a nice place to visit, but he wouldn't want to live there. When I arose and ventured out the next morning, the maid was cleaning his room. He was long gone.

TURISTA



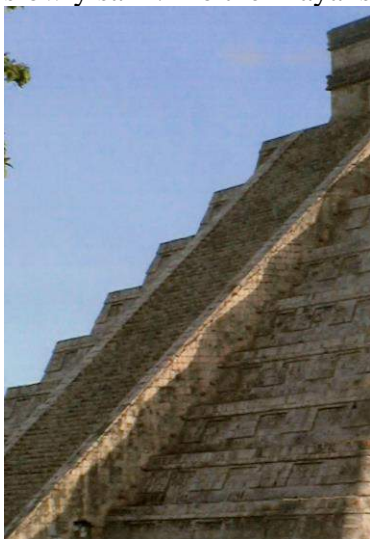
After reading at length about the incredible archeological finds unearthed in Mexico's eastern Yucatán Province of Mayan and Toltec civilizations dating from 600 AD or even earlier, I became fascinated, by one main structure in particular – The Pyramid of Kukulcán, or El Castillo, as it was locally called, in the region known as Chichén Itzá, not far from the city of Merida. Also learning that a rare phenomenon occurred there at spring and autumn equinoxes, I determined to try to be there for the one on September 21, 1956.

I realized that much of the surrounding pre-Columbian site had yet to be completely excavated, but at least three sides of the limestone Pyramid could be visited, and the phenomenon took place on the north, or front of the structure and could be readily observed at that time. Over 100 feet high and an acre in area, it was a stepped back platform type pyramid, with nine identical indentations on all sides leading to vaulted chambers on top. Access on each was by 91 wide (but perilously) narrow central steps with balustrades on each side that, at ground level become poised sculpted serpent heads, and at the top tier end in erect carved rattles. Thus it was also called the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent. The entire structure was dedicated to the Mayan god *Kukulcán*, known by Toltecs as *Quetzalcoatl*.

Inside the top chambers were walls covered with sculpted figures and hieroglyphic inscriptions, or vividly colored paintings. In the center was the Jaguar Throne – a carved and painted object inlaid with shell ornamentation with features of jade and crystal. Within the pyramid was another pyramid down underneath with chambers and corridors running through it so humid that it could make one feel downright claustrophobic and ill. Around the rest of

the site, covering about one square mile, were as yet not totally unearthed entities such as the Ball Park for religious rites, consisting of two parallel walls with large stone rings protruding from each about 25 feet above ground, players supposedly attempting to send a ball through them; the losers – or winners (not known which) losing their heads. There was also a Nunnery, a Colonnade, a Temple of Warriors, a round Caracol (probably an astronomical observatory), and a Sacred Well.

Now to the equinoctial phenomenon, difficult to explain until actually witnessed: as the sun passed over the pyramid from east to west in late afternoon, the west side was in full sun, while the north slope was entirely in shadow except for the raised edge of its right hand balustrade that caught just enough rays across the west's platform corners to create an undulating pattern of light the full length of the pyramid that seemed to wiggle downward to earth as the sun slowly sank. To the Mayans it meant the return to the soil of the sacred Feathered Serpent to replenish it each season.



The terrain around the site was so sere and forbidding looking to the modern eye, it was difficult to realize it might have once been fertile. But every year at times of Equinox neighboring Indians faithfully arrived in droves to witness the phenomenon. And the *henequen* plant that produced sisal was once a prevalent crop for harvesting in all the Yucatán, with barons cultivating it on large plantations, and living in grand haciendas in Merida city. That

was all changing by 1956. The industry had failed and haciendas lay abandoned all along the city's elegant Paseo Montejo.

It was an amazing experience for me to see the serpent phenomenon in person. Pictures could never have done it justice. As I watched, mesmerized by the three dimensional aspect of it, there was something also creepy and sinister about it also. Quetzacoatl was a "serpent" god and there were depictions of snakes everywhere in the pyramid and outside it. I wanted something less menacing to remember the visit by.

It came in something overheard that a guide was telling a group of students touring the ruins. She said that the resplendent native Quetzal bird, indigenous to all Mezzo-American countries, as well as the name given to the currency of Guatamala, was near extinction, but was for thousands of years representative of 'the spirit of Maya' and the 'heart of the sky'. Asking the students if they had seen this magnificent bird, they all answered yes, and she asked them to describe it for someone who had never seen it. It had a crested green-gold head and small bright yellow beak (at least the male), with bronze - green iridescent back and wing feathers that partly concealed the long glistening tail. Its breast was crimson with an iridescent green bib, and white under parts. Truly a magnificent adornment for any god. The guide then told them something they didn't all know – that if one were to stand at the top of the 91 steps of the pyramid and make hand claps, that would echo period-ic reflections off the lower step stones, the resulting sounds would be very much like the chirping of that sacred bird. They all dashed off to do it.

After having followed tunnels to chambers in the inner pyramid so humid and claustrophobic that it was making me feel nauseous, and seeing endless depictions of ritual torture (however artistically presented), I could do with a little light-hearted bird chirping. I followed them up the great staircase. I'd taken all those steps when I first arrived in the morning, and was so winded when I reached the top platform that I had become light-headed and vowed not to do it again. But there I was, trailing right after them. I reached only the mid-sixties in count. But by then the kids were at the top and clapping away. Even from where I stood, there actually were strange chirping-like sounds reverberating upward. Since I'd never heard (or seen, for that matter) a *Quetzal*, I had to take on faith it was the call of that rare creature. At least it brightened my outlook. Sundown had brought out myriad mosquitoes, the serpent phenomenon was lost to an encroaching cloudbank, and so I called it a day.

Back in Merida, the next morning I set out early to do some sketching in the outdoor *mercado*, and found it a visual delight. The indigenous women wore traditional long pristine white *hipiles* with lace or flower-embroidered bodices. The men were in ubiquitous *guayabera* shirts and broad-brimmed straw hats. Surprisingly, the most popular selling items were woven hammocks. They were everywhere and in gloriously rich combinations of patterns. The

best, it was learned, were ones loosely woven to allow air to cool the backsides of reclining snoozers. But the heat under the overhead canvases became intense and I was glad that I had promised four fellows from our plane trip from Miami to meet for lunch back at the hotel.

Our table was on a shady patio, and a *mariachi* band was practicing in a distant room. My table mates were all there on business, so attired in shirts and ties. All of us wore sunglasses against the glare of the hotel's upper sun-drenched walls. Over cooling drinks, one of them asked me to tell again, for their amusement, what happened to me on the plane coming over. I was happy to. From the beginning:

We left Miami on an early morning Aeroméxico DC-4 prop-liner flight bound for Merida on September 21. The DC-4s, famous in WW II for cargo transport and later refitted for short run passenger travel, usually had 8 rows of seats, two on each side of the aisle. Ours was nicely appointed: a light blue barrel vault ceiling, with tan seat upholstery, matching disposable paper head rests and window curtains. At the rear, opening directly onto the aisle was a toilet that seemed to have lost its original door and was covered instead by a cretonne curtain, all-over jungle leaves, from a rod by leather loops. The bottom had leather tabs at each side that were meant to be snapped onto the door jambs, but hung limply on the floor.

There were only five of us passengers on board – four men together at the very front and yours truly bringing up the rear. I was experiencing a mild case of *turista* (that my mother used to call 'nervous tummy'). It hadn't yet blossomed into a full-fledged *Montezuma Two-Step*, or worse, *Montezuma's Revenge*, but I wasn't taking any chances, and sat close to the foliage. Our stewardess – still called that in 1956 – was an affable young *senorita* with jet hair and eyes, in a crisp uniform the same color as the seats. She did her duty with the safety litany in accented English, told us the flight would take 2 hours or so, depending on the 'air', and passed around packets of nuts and Mexican 'cola'.

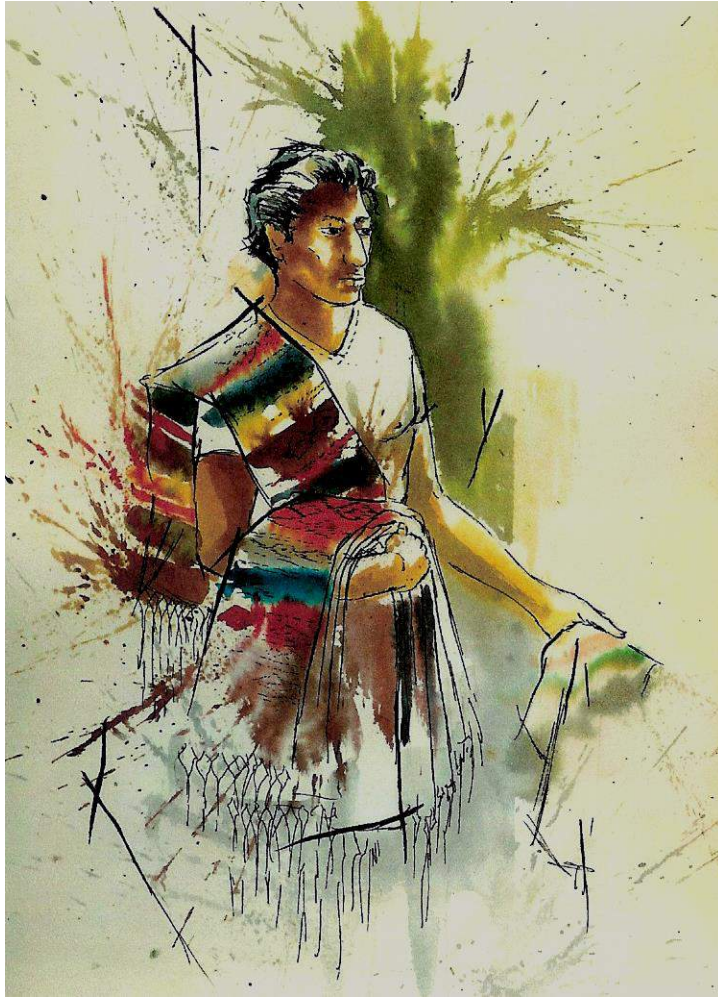
She clicked everything in its place up front, and headed toward the back of the plane. She slipped off her jacket and pumps, tucked in her white blouse and plunked down in the seat across the aisle from me. From the pouch on the seatback before her she pulled out a dog-eared movie magazine with sepia pictures and text and be-

came engrossed, chewing gum rhythmically with the chugging engines. The flight was so far quite smooth by local standards. The 'air' over the conjunction of the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico was known to be fickle, and 'smooth' could turn 'turbulent' almost at whim. Feeling a sudden bowel urge, and deciding it'd be better to go while the going was good, I made for the cretonne curtain.

I knew it would happen. No sooner had I stepped behind the curtain, dropped my pants and sat on the commode, than the plane began pitching, sinking, and rising with a vengeance. Then, with me in mid-movement, it lurched forward. Having no handlebars to grab, I was helplessly lifted bodily up and out through the cretonne, landing in a heap in the aisle next to the stewardess. Desperate to pull on my pants and zip up, I tripped and fell down again. Two of the men in front saw my plight and staggered toward me along the still pitching aisle. They grabbed some toilet paper and handed it to me. By then I was so mortified, I could have dropped out of the plane. Throughout the ruckus, the stewardess stoically sat reading and chewing, and when I finally arose to make humble apologies, she merely shrugged and said, 'No problema. Happen alla time.'

I stumbled behind the curtain and cleaned up as best I could. Meanwhile the plane was jerking so badly. the co-pilot came into the cabin and announced that we would have to ascend above the thick clouds up ahead. We snapped on our seat belts again and prepared for worse. And it was. As one of the other front men called it, 'A ride from Hell!' It continued that way almost until landing in Merida, sparkling in serene sunlight. As we stepped onto the landing stairs, we agreed that the flight had done terrible things to our sinuses and ears. No matter how widely I yawned – which had al-ways worked before – nothing relieved the pressure. We agreed to meet next day for lunch and co-commiserate.

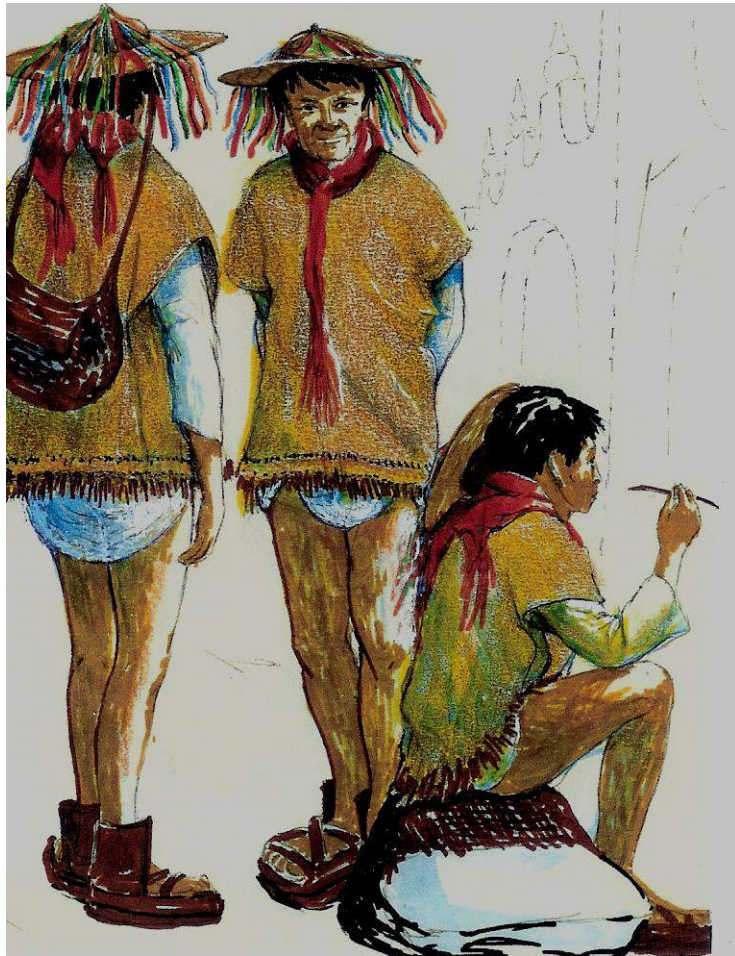
As we were doing so over drinks in the patio, one salesman asked if I'd looked in the mirror since the flight. I said I'd been too busy with my itinerary. He told me to lift off my sunglasses. I did and they all went 'Aha!', and took off theirs. We had two purple shiners apiece! One guy had learned from the airport that many DC-4s were NOT pressurized. Ours was one, and we had hundreds of tiny burst blood vessels around our eyes to prove it. We decided to forego photos. Nobody'd believe we hadn't lost in a gang war.



Donn Russell

Serape Vendor - Mercado de Merida 1956

248a



Donn Russell

Zanacantálos of San Cristóbal de Las Casas 1956

CODA: Some Enchanted City

The overnight bus trek from Merida into the high mountain reaches of Chiapas in the very south, where Mexico met Guatemala, was simply awful. But the thirteen hours of bad roads and heat prostration were mitigated by arrival in the beautiful highland city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. At a cool 7,000 foot elevation, and surrounded by seven cloud-skimming peaks, it gleamed in the sun like the idyllic Shangri-La in James Hilton's epic 'Lost Horizons'.

It was the central seat for many tiny villages nestled in nearby dense pine forests with ancient Mayan names like Zaanacantán and Tenejapa. All speaking dialects of the Tzotzil tongue, the indigenous gathered daily in San Cristóbal's central square in front of its gaudy red-trim ochre cathedral to market their handmade goods.

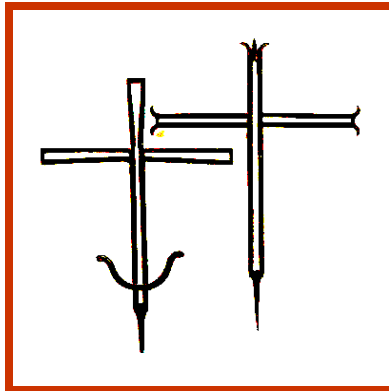
One group in particular, the Zaanacantálos, were the most eye-catching. Women all wore uniform tufted black wool skirts, white blouses and electric blue shawls with indigo embroidery. Ribbons were woven into raven braids joined behind. But the males of the species were spectacular: bare-legged in thick sandals with leather heel backs that reached up to mid-calf; white diaper-like loincloths colorfully sashed; full sleeved white shirts beneath fringed striped ponchos with orange piping; and most remarkable, flat round broad brimmed straw hats with shallow domed crowns and covered with free flowing multi-colored ribbons all around them (loose for single men and at a rakish angle, tied in a knot in back for husbands). Over one shoulder all carried a neatly folded dark red serape.

The men caused striking peacock stances, but beware, picture-takers! Behind the showmanship were vicious natives believing in the superstition that photos captured their souls, and they could become angered and quickly attack photographers or snatch and destroy cameras. (A German couple I befriended displayed a camera invented for the purpose: a secret lens opening on the side that took pictures while the taker was facing innocently forward. They were among the very few and far between to capture such shots. I had it much easier— and safer. Drawing them in a sketchbook didn't seem to bother them. In fact they often came around to see me working.)

After selling their produce and wares, those Mayans entered the Cathedral, sexes separated, for worship like no other. As with most compulsory early converts to Spanish Catholicism, they included a number of pagan gods in their prayers. Therefore the interior of the

basilica contained a mish-mash of cultural and religious clashes: Biblical saints wearing indigenous clothing; communicants, knelt on the stone floor strewn with pine needles, each of which represented the soul of one of their dead. Candles flickered everywhere, their heat stifling and incense so overpowering it choked the throat. (Not unlike St. Mary the Virgin Church near Times Square in New York that Arthur belonged to and I attended, its high mass using so much incense it was affectionately dubbed ‘Smoky Mary’s’.) In one dark corner of the sanctuary was the figure of *Cristo* lying flat in a coffin. Gruesome as it looked, it wasn’t as bad as the crucifix in the cathedral in Mexico City which was placed horizontally over a fountain of red liquid that squirted up from His stigmata and side. There were indigenous healers (*Ilol*) in weird garb chanting with supplicants responding in unique dialects, and then crossing themselves. When they went home to their separate towns, they prayed to spirits occupying the surrounding forests and mountains. What a marvelously rich and slightly scary heritage, I thought.

The name of the city was derived from two sources: San Cristóbal, a rather obscure patron saint of journeys, and Don Bartolomé de Las Casas, an early Spaniard who became involved in bettering the lot of the local Indians. It was a good name for such a lovely place to visit. The local non-indigenous inhabitants were known as *labinos* (not *latinos*) From one, a fine blacksmith, I commissioned



these crosses that seemed to represent the conglomerate. They were copied from a small stucco chapel downhill from the Zocaló, and he finished them in a day. I centered them on my Nantucket Island bedroom wall to be first images seen on waking. A Zancantán poncho hung over a nearby rafter, as was a sash from one of those diapers; a flat sombrero was for gardening, without the ribbons. Seeing them, no one had to ask which place in all my travels I held most dear. I never told that it was there I came down with a touch of malaria that recurred sporadically all my life (though it surely originated from a Merida mosquito bite). I smiled at the local remedy: quinine and coca-cola, its bubbly after-effect said to release all sins and ills from the body. They believed it!

Pissoirs de Paree 1961

Arthur and I spent a lot of time while in Paris simply walking about the city, and, in good weather, ending up for an afternoon's snooze on the metal chairs in the Luxembourg Gardens. One of the reasons we chose that spot, just down from Les Invalides, was the *pissoir* nearby. Carefully camouflaged by bushes and trees, it afforded respite and a modicum of privacy not found in many other such facilities. Also it was said to be a favorite of famous writers who availed themselves of it, most particularly Henry Miller. What was good enough for Henry was certainly good enough for us.

Pissoirs, of course, had been ubiquitous to Paris ever since the first one was erected in 1841. While other world cities afforded little in the way of relief for its male inhabitants (New York was, and continued to be, notoriously delinquent in that category), the City of Light was far more enlightened. Originally they were called *vespasiennes* after the Roman emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus, who succeeded the fiddling Nero in 69 AD. He was the first known to have the idea of facilitating public urination by installing large earthenware urns all over Rome (no references as to how they were drained).

They blossomed in the Napoleon III Empire days (1852-1870 as the pissoirs formed an essential part of the embellishment of Paris streets, along with lamp posts, water fountains, benches and kiosks with architectural styles ranging from Gothic to Classical to Baroque, with some later Deco and Nouveau additions. It would follow that poster art by some of the best French painters would be specifically designed to adorn them eventually, and they would find their way to new aesthetics in work of Jean Dubuffet, Marcel Duchamp and other artists.

By our era, Gauloises (cigarettes), garlic and pissoirs had long defined the 'olfactory essence' of Paris. We had become accustomed to the smells and exposure of our bodies (below the knees and above the shoulders) behind the metal barriers. But even at that there were occasionally embarrassing and frustrating moments to have to deal with. One of them occurred late on a misty fall afternoon at rush hour on a major boulevard. The facility we entered was a long rectangle with a rusted enclosure. Everything was damp

from dripping trees, including two marble slabs each to stand on. They were about a foot high with tops slanted downward toward the barrier, spaced about a foot apart and a foot and a half back from it. It just happened that we had bought shoes in New York with a new kind of composition sole that was gaining popularity with professionals like cops and school guards. It looked to be of hardened rubber cement, and guaranteed not to slip on wet surfaces. We also wore raincoats, unbuttoned for the procedure.

Arthur took a stance on his slabs, facing the barrier, and I followed suit on mine after parking my umbrella to one side. We saw a mass of heads scurrying hither and yon beyond us on the sidewalk, making a dizzying blur. Nobody glanced our way. It was as if we were part of the structure. I looked heavenward into the violet eye of the street lamp that had just come on above, as if to appear nonchalant.

Slowly and incrementally we both felt ourselves sliding helplessly down the slabs toward the wall. Gum soles weren't working. My hands were occupied with holding open my coat and at the same time trying to do my business. Arthur was doing the same. As the rusty wall loomed closer and the heads on the other side larger, we looked at each other quizzically. Arthur dropped hold of his coat on one side, raising that hand to push himself back from the wall. The coat closed in while doing so and he peed all down the lining. He was moaning, 'Oh, no. Oh, no.'

I had my own problems. My zipper wouldn't undo all the way and I ended up sideways with one shoulder braced against the wall, bent over and keeping my coat out of the way with both elbows to free all ten fingertips to work on the pesky clasp, at the same time trying to hold the wall at bay with white knuckles. We were both distraught to say the least. The mist had become rain, and the rush hour lineup of men anxious to *changer le poison doux* was getting longer and more vocal.

Just when we thought things couldn't get any worse, who would come along but an old *clocharde* wielding a mop on a long handle and muttering to herself and spitting aside. She stuck the mop first between my legs from behind, then all around my marble slab. She repeated the procedure with Arthur, who had accepted his fate, but stood holding the front of his coat away from him. Her appearance made me lose what little control I had, and a dark stain widened on my pants. Arthur and I were in stitches all the soggy way home.

To celebrate Arthur's early retirement from a managerial job in the New York Housing Authority, we planned to hook up at one of the world's greatest festivals – the Feria de Abril in Seville, Spain soon afterwards. I took the train from Granada where I was staying and sketching at the Alhambra Palace. The Feria had taken place in the city since 1847, where it began as a rather mundane cattle trade fair and eventually blossomed – literally, with all the orange trees producing fruit and fragrance – into the spectacle we were about to witness.

Seville, the capital of Andalusia, and noted as Columbus's starting off place, was famed for bull fighting, its own music and dance and festivals galore. That one occurred annually two weeks after Easter and brought out the most splendor in form of costumes and spectacle. Men on horseback wore 'trajes cortos', elegant slim grey suits with fitted pants, short jackets and matching wide brimmed grey hats. Women wore 'trajes de gitano', gypsy or flamenco dress with many colorful flounces, tall combs with mantillas and fans.

The first things we noticed as we met at the central train station, were signs everywhere with cryptic 'NO 8 DO' on them. Come to find out it meant 'no me ha dejado' or 'she never abandoned me', uttered by Alfonso the Wise after the city remained loyal to him in a 13th century battle. It had become the city's motto. We made our way through the crowds and din to nearby Parque de Maria Luisa to enjoy the *paseo* (strolling). Both Arthur and I admitted we had intestinal problems and hoped the motto would hold for finding an *excusado* (toilet) soon. When it did, it was subterranean, dank and not redolent of orange blossoms. At the top of the steps was an old peasant lady who doled out sheets of *papel de excusado* – you got it– ten for a peseta. We descended into separate cubbyholes. Finding ten each totally inadequate for our purposes when we settled in, Arthur, in agony and not able to rise to the occasion, implored me to go back and buy more, quick. I tugged my pants up to my waist in front, hoping my shirttail would hide any indecent exposure behind. Of course, just as I started back down with ten more each, a group of kids hanging on the railing pointed to my backside and shouted something I never learned in Spanish 101.

When all was well and we ascended, Arthur noticed a fountain and a brilliant rainbow in it. Seville hadn't abandoned *us* either, Al.

The Money Belt 1997

Standing on one of the foot bridges over The Strip and looking back at the intersection of the MGM Grand, New York New York, Excalibur and Tropicana by night with all those hotels illuminated in a rainbow of colors was, Arthur and I agreed, truly *the* most satisfying sight to behold in all Las Vegas's gaudy array of overstatements. After dark, we agreed, was the best time to go out to see the sights along that length of thoroughfare I already decreed was the money belt of middle America. Also it was the only time in the day cool enough to be outside.

We had flown in about midday, rented a Geo at the airport to drive to what we described later as 'a little place just across the way from MGM Grand', hoping to impress that we had accommodations on a par with that green giant, when in fact we were holed up in a Super 8 Motel under its vast purple shadow. The heat was so blistering outside that after the trek from the airport, the floor of the little Geo was too hot to keep our feet on, so we rested till sundown in our humble but respectably air conditioned digs.

Then we ventured forth on foot, in shorts, to investigate the highly acclaimed newest Strip addition, 'New York New York'. (When we got there, we were pleased to find our own Waverly Place in Greenwich Village and played a few slots.) But on the way we spied, over the above-mentioned foot bridge, the glory that was Egypt in the form of a glistening pyramid, surely as high as an original, or, remembering where we were, even higher. It rested atop the Hotel Luxor, and was actually built with livable accommodations.

Having read in Fodor that it had one of the best cafeterias in the whole city, we turned left off the ramp to investigate. Anyone spending time in gambling casinos knew that the adjacent eating places were generally excellent and had competitive prices. The planners were smart to make them cafeterias – eat fast and get on with the gambling. We found the menu extensive and affordable, and lingered long over seconds. After a short stroll up the Strip and a pleasant diversion at Treasure Island's acclaimed outdoor water extravaganza with cast of thousands, 'Buccaneer Bay': a full-scaled manned pirate ship in full sail intercepted and sank an oncoming vessel, Britannia, drowning all including the captain –

every hour on the hour. The fun was in seeing if we could detect any of the actors who were 'drowned' swimming underwater to escape hatches in the huge tank in front of the hotel. We couldn't. It was very convincingly contrived.

Not convincing at all was the performance at Caesar's Palace's main lobby where, for 20 minutes at a time, animated statues spoke in amplified voices. It was creepy and very tacky, and exactly why we had not visited Las Vegas before. We opted to hit the hay.

Next morning, after a sumptuous breakfast at MGM Grand, we found it impossible to spend any time walking about in the intense heat of the streets. The solution: an all-day, all-inclusive air conditioned bus tour of all the sights and sites. It worked out fine, as far as comfort went, but the itinerary was no more exciting in daylight than riding along Miami Beach at high noon—blindingly bright behemoths set in lush gardens of Eden beside fake lakes. Las Vegas only got real after dark.

However, our tour bus drove up alongside the Frontier Hotel for the lunch stop. The second oldest hotel/casino in town, it boasted a life-sized stage coach sculpture in front, replete with two drivers up top, passengers inside, and 2 pairs of convincing-looking horses ahead. Its theme was the Old West: saddles and lariats adorning the walls; swinging louvered doors; male staff in beat up cowboy hats and boots; 'gal' cocktail waitresses in brief checkered skirts.

Because other buses had pulled in before us, we had to wait outside in line under the scorching desert sun. On a phony entry porch was displayed a vintage one-armed bandit. Sitting in front of it was an equally ancient real-life creature with piled high platinum hair, harlequin glasses, a cigarette dangling from her mouth. She was scrutinizing the slot machine windows intently. Very high heels tapped nervously on the floor boards. Just when we thought she was simply an animated automaton like at Caesar's, she shouted an expletive, stood up and walked aside, fuming into her handbag for another ciggie. Her face was a mask of furious wrinkles.

Deciding to take advantage of the situation, Arthur, pulling out a quarter, said he'd like to have a go at the machine himself while waiting for lunch. Just for the helluvit. He asked the old gambler if she was finished. She waved the cigarette hand at it dismissively. He approached as if confronting a crouching tiger, and inserted the coin. The entire lunch line was watching. He yanked the arm down and stepped back.

Suddenly bells rang out all over. Arthur stepped further back. I got out of line and dashed over. Quarters, hundreds of them began clunking noisily into the metal tray and then spilling down onto the floor. Pandemonium reigned. Chink, chink, chink. The coins went everywhere. From inside the casino, ‘cowboy’ staff members hurried on the scene, carrying white plastic pails. They and I fell on our knees. The coins kept falling. Chink. Chink. Chink. We hastily scraped armfuls towards us. By then the queue crowd was screaming and clapping. (Some thought we were part of an act.)

Arthur stood frozen in place, wringing his hands, repeating, ‘I can’t believe it. I can’t believe it. Can’t believe it.’ As soon as the bells ceased, a male voice boomed on the loudspeakers all over the casino, singing the old Depression chestnut from *Gold Diggers of 1933*, by Al Dubin and Harry Warren,

‘We’re in the money, we’re in the money;
We’ve got a lot of what it takes to get along!
We’re in the money, that sky is sunny,
Old Man Depression you are through, you done us wrong...’

Arthur looked mortified. Everyone was staring. The lunch line was moving ahead. We remained to pick up any stray coins in the area, but were harassed by the old lady in heels screaming it was her money. She’d been sitting there all morning, and those were her quarters. Chink, chink. Thief, thief. We’re in the...! Oy! Arthur was almost beside himself with confusion. ‘Let’s get out of here!’

The ‘cowboys’ helped me carry the buckets to the cashier, who was nonchalantly chewing bubble gum behind her cage. The coins were thrown into a large counting machine. There were 1200 of the precious nuggets. Enough to get home on from the six \$50 bills she slipped under the plate glass – not all that great, really, considering the hullabaloo it created. We missed lunch. Back on the bus, where Arthur immediately fell asleep, I kept re-playing that idiotic tune in my head as we rolled along with the tumbling tumbleweeds:

‘We’re in the money, come on, my honey,
Let’s lend it, spend it, send it rolling along.’

P.S. The Frontier was imploded in 2007, to make way for a new glass palace. The boom was heard for miles. Chink. Chink. Chink.

Arthur and I had a first floor apartment at 200 Waverly Place in Greenwich Village, whose living room windows in back, a jungle of exotic plants, looked down on an outdoor sunken patio off the basement below us and our next door neighbor. Possibly meant for a never planted garden, its current concrete expanse had a table and a scattered chair or two, but made no pretense at suggesting *au pleine air* dining or entertaining. The encompassing whitewashed stone wall rose high enough to block out any view of pedestrian and vehicular traffic on Seventh Avenue beyond, but not trees and sky or the afternoon sun that allowed our ficus to flourish.

Access to the street was by concrete steps built against the far wall that lead up and out a decrepit wrought iron gate at one end, just opposite my studio window, with only a blurry glimpse of passing activity on the thoroughfare. Except for an occasional peeing drunk and the mechanics who fixed foreign cars on the other side of the wall and used a basement room for changing, it was a relatively serene environment.

The entire basement space had been the living quarters and art and photography studio of a most remarkable couple when we first moved there in 1961. They were Lisette and Evsa Model, she more remarkable than he. Lisette was born Elise Stern in Vienna in 1904. Her father, a well-to-do Jew changed the surname to Seyberg to escape encroaching persecution and died after World War II. Her mother moved to Nice, France with her sister Olga.

Lisette continued musical studies for a time in Vienna. She planned on becoming an opera singer. But on a visit to her mother and sister in the 1920s, became enamored of her sister's avocation, photography. Moving on to Paris, she began photographing street life, particularly the seamier side, calling her pictures "candid". Her invented term caught on with other practitioners and she began making a name for herself, selling "candid" photos to influential magazine editors. At the same time she met and married Evsa Model, a Russian "constructivist" artist. Constructivism was a term given to an avant-garde (mostly Russian) movement that eschewed realism for geometric shapes, lettering as art, and bold clashing colors.

It was short lived, but he persevered at it even after the couple had immigrated to New York. He would always remain in her shadow. By 1940 she was the premiere woman photographer in New

York, an acknowledged pioneer in the field. Her studies of the denizens on the Lower East Side and Coney Island were shown everywhere, and several became classics, especially the picture of a stout woman in a skintight one-piece black bathing suit, breasts ready to pop out, with her toes buried in wet sand at ebb tide, bent over toward the viewer with her hands on her thighs, a broad smile on her face, and short dark hair blown back in the wind.

Edward Steichen, the famous photographer and then director of the category at the Museum of Modern Art, would eventually give her 13 one-woman shows over the years. She became popular at the New School for Social Research, teaching her “snapshot aesthetics” to students who themselves became famous, including her protégé, Diane Arbus.

In 1960 Lisette Model developed some form of cancer and survived it, but limited herself thereafter to teaching more at home, even though she continued an affiliation with the New School. We would watch as 30 or 40 pupils made their way down the concrete steps three evenings a week to disappear into the basement below. In time admirers from all over the world came to do homage. She received numerous awards and accolades. But both she and Evsa were getting on. He was chronically ill, some said sadly depressed at his lack of artistic recognition. They helped each other walk, two bent white haired figures locked together – always together, shuffling cautiously. They ascended the stairs ever more slowly and painfully, the railing their lifeline. And then not at all.

When we returned in 1979 after a summer on Nantucket Island they were gone—whether to a nursing home facility or a more readily accessible living arrangement, we never found out. I read her glowing New York Times obituary after her death in 1983, but nothing more of him. We assumed he went before her. I missed seeing them lumbering up to the iron gate every morning, determined to greet the new day against all odds. They were an inspiration. We mutually waved, and were congenial, but seldom talked at length. They were confirmed loners in spite of their fame.

Their basement space went empty and unused for years, and it was then that I availed myself of their stairway as a shortcut to the Avenue. One bright Sunday morning in spring 1980 I bounded up it to purchase a Times at the corner convenience store. As I yanked open the pesky iron gate, I looked down and saw a wad of what I assumed was waste paper on the sidewalk, a little larger than a golf

ball, and was about to kick it aside when I saw it was a green/grey color with lettering. On closer inspection, it was obviously money of some kind. Excited and apprehensive at the same time, I closed the gate and ran back to our apartment, holding it out in front of me like a miniature time bomb.

Arthur was getting ready to go to church, but I said he should stop and have a look at it. He watched as I peeled the top layer off. Smoothing it out on the kitchen table, we were both overwhelmed. It was a hundred dollar bill, badly rumpled though recognizable. But that wasn't all. There was more to the wad – another hundred dollar bill, and then another, and another and another. We stood dumbstruck looking down at five in all. A veritable crinkled horde if ever there was one.

Not sure what I should do with it, we both thought a moment and then Arthur advised, wisely, that it should be taken to our local police station. What if it was drug money? Or stolen? Or counterfeit? I would have a hard time convincing authorities it was found on the street. Our neighborhood, usually calm, was also known to be territory for high roller gamblers and drug lords on weekends. Better not take a chance.

I walked Arthur to his bus stop, asked him to say a prayer for me, then headed down 10th Street in the direction of the Hudson River. The 6th Precinct Headquarters was relatively calm that Sunday morning, only a few drunks sleeping it off in the pens, and a drag queen checking her compact mirror in one corner (probably a detective in disguise, I figured). The officer on the front desk was not all bluster and macho gesturing as one might expect. It was a good eleven years since the notorious Stonewall Riots in the same neighborhood, when patrons (mostly in drag) at a gay bar by that name rioted when cops busted in to arrest them at a 'wake' being held for Judy Garland the night she died. The 'queens' prevailed and it was the beginning of 'gay liberation' in America. The police in the Village had since been trained for tolerance, and lost their ubiquitous bravado, at least outwardly.

I told the officer my story and showed him the bills. Joking with his buddies that they would make a nice down payment on a brand new fridge for 'the little lady', he drew out a manila envelope, told me to place the money in it, seal it and write my address on the other side. Then, as others witnessed, he poured hot wax on the flap and stamped it hard with the Precinct logo. As the other cops

kidded that it would be the last I saw of it, he indicated that six months from that date, I'd receive a postcard with a code number on it and I was to take it to the big headquarters downtown to claim it. I left with a funny feeling the other cops were right.

But I was wrong. When six months rolled by, I had already spent about five of them on Nantucket Island and had literally forgotten the episode when I returned to New York to find, several weeks later, a post card from the Police Department headquarters. It was a reminder to appear on a certain day between certain hours to 'claim personal property'. I was dumbfounded – yet elated.

Where I had to show up was even more exciting. The former New York City Police Headquarters (the new one, several blocks away, was opened only a year before that, so some departments were still on the old premises) was a National Landmark, and deservedly so. It was erected in 1909 on a narrow triangular plot at 240 Center Street, between Broome and Grand Streets in what was called Little Italy. The magnificent pie-shaped building, designed by architects Hoppin and Koen, was in Beaux Arts, or sometimes called Edwardian Baroque style, very ornate and imposing with a huge copper dome midsection. Built of beige granite with limestone decorations and iron tracing, it dominated the entire downtown area for many years, and was a tribute to the New York City Police Department that was the first police force in America, circa 1845.

I was directed to the rear, or point of the triangle, and up a great winding staircase to the Lost and Found. A motley line of seekers was already waiting near the top. Inside were three ornate brass cages behind which officers dispatched the "treasures" from locked drawers behind them. They called out the articles as they passed them through bank grids: 'glass eyes, eye glasses, umbrellas, false teeth, briefcases, false teeth, watches, jewelry, false teeth ...' When my number came up – 'five one hundred dollar bills' – it was broadcast loudly. As I stepped out of the line, I felt envious eyes burning into me. There were gulps of astonishment. I signed for them quickly, and, head down, dashed out of the building, certain I'd be followed and mugged.

Instead of walking leisurely home, I grabbed a cab and hurried back to the safe confines of my corroded iron gate. Its mangled filigree never seemed more graceful, or knuckled hinges more supple: all in all, a proper portal for the realms of Serendipity.

Arthur and I had never slept together in the same bed in all the long years we'd shared living quarters. In the early days in New York on Barrow and Downing Streets there were bunk beds, and on Waverly Place he had a bedroom and I slept on the pullout sofa in the living room. Likewise, when we were on Nantucket Island in summer we each had a bedroom. So the experience was new to us in the early spring of 1990, and worth relating.

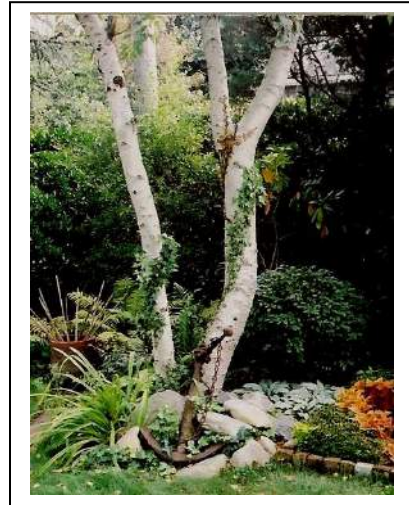
We were visiting George and Richard at their cottage out on the high, bleak windswept expanse of Madequecham bluff overlooking (and occasionally sprayed by) the pounding surf from the Atlantic Ocean. The best that could be said about their place was 'location, location, location'. It boasted a 300 degree panoramic view, except for an over-the-right-shoulder intrusion of the Nantucket Airport with its towers and up and down traffic. The ocean itself divided a good half of that view, with scrub oak and the tip of Sankaty Head Lighthouse faintly sketched in back of their barn.

The house was a jerry-built amalgam of accumulated treasures from the town dump's 'take it or leave it' section, gussied up by the guys' own knack for creating palaces out of trash. Windows facing the ocean tended to leak in rain, doors stuck in all kinds of weather, and the rooms were continually drafty. In essence, it was a nice place to hang out with a drink in hand, watch the sun set over the yardarm and have a late dinner. But no place to live.

George and Richard were our longest living pals. We met them in the '60 when they lived in Lambertville, New Jersey. George was teaching music in local public schools and Richard taught culinary arts at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. They were neighbors of two priests Arthur knew from New York. Richard and I had a special affinity since I had gone to Pratt, and he was a printmaker like me. He was kind and generous when he wanted to be, and a mean prick to those who slighted him in any way. His artistic integrity could not be questioned. But I understood him and we got along fine.

A year or so after Arthur and I purchased our Nantucket place, Richard drove his van (that they used for their fledgling side business of selling off-beat country antiques) from Bucks County, PA, to the island with me riding shotgun, holding the ball of a paper birch tree in my lap. Its tip swayed far beyond the open back doors that were tied to it. Whenever we hit a Connecticut Turnpike jag the trunk heaved, causing the huge ball to bounce against my groin

unmercifully. I couldn't even get out for relief on the 3-hour ferry ride over. My lower extremities were off limits for months.



George was all about George. One had the feeling, when talking to him, that he couldn't wait for you to finish so he could begin. I put up with his egocentricities because he did interesting things and was good company. And, as Arthur often noted, they were old friends and we simply had to accept their peccadillos.

Now to the evening in question. We'd lately had a long rainy spell and the dirt road out to their house was horrendous – the most

awful ruts and water clogged gullies ever encountered, and my li'l Ford station wagon was splattered with mud when we got there. Not a very confident driver, I was a nervous wreck thinking what could happen if we got stuck. I needed a drink right away. Arthur seconded the motion, and had one too. Our hosts were on seconds.

The low clouds parted long enough to present us with a lovely sunset sparkle on the water that was calming. But then the air grew chill and we went in off the deck. The main room of the house was the full length of it, and included a sitting area, dining section and off of it, a small kitchen divided by a counter. A hallway midsection led to two bedrooms, one on the left behind the sitting area, and another on the right behind the kitchen. The bathroom was directly ahead. In the center of the main room in front of the hall was a circular iron staircase that rose to more bedrooms in the eaves, their sleeping quarters. Tucked under the stairs was a harpsichord, untouched as I remembered. A woodstove heated the sitting area.

The predominant theme throughout was 'casual country'. The long plank dining table was set with their customary eclectic flair. Hand thrown pottery was always in evidence, along with thick woven placemats, chunky glassware and sea-smooth stones and rare shells casually placed about. The glow of fat candles lit a spray of freshly picked field flowers down the center. They both gardened.

The hosts were as casual as their surroundings. I, for one, never saw them in Nantucket wearing anything but shorts pants, no mat-

ter the weather or occasion. Richard, who was soon to become grossly obese (and needed a special device to pull on his socks in the morning), resembled an overgrown English schoolboy – which he had been – with a petulant little mouth, and shock of prematurely white bangs. Seated, his gut engulfed his thighs, making his legs seem shorter. He had artistic ability, talked little and drank heavily.

George was slimmer, more ambulant and loquacious. At times when he spoke he worked himself up into a high-pitched rant that challenged the eardrums. He also tended to embroider details that Richard was first to correct, leading to minor squabbles, Richard doing most of the bickering and George acquiescing to make nice. He was not an artist, but had a good sense of style and an eye for art objects and how to display them. He also drank a lot.

When invited to the dinner table, we were seated on some of the most handsome – and arse crushing – wooden chairs imaginable. They were handmade at the New Hope, PA workshop of the world renowned architectural furniture designer George Nakashima. He and the two fellows had been longtime friends since their restaurant owning days in Washington Crossing on the Delaware. They had purchased a burned out stone tobacco (or some such) factory, rebuilt the insides and furnished it with Nakashima pieces. It was photographed extensively and shown in a number of high end decorating books and magazines that helped spread all their fame, and his fortune.

Nakashima was an interesting person. Born in Spokane WA of Japanese parents, he, with them and many other hapless Japanese Americans, had been sent to internment camps in the desert wastes of Idaho in 1942. There he met a man trained in traditional Japanese carpentry, who taught him the use of its tools. A benefactor arranged for his release in 1943 and set him up on his farm in New Hope, PA., across the Delaware from Washington Crossing. Influenced also by simple Shaker designs, Nakashima tried to find the essence of each plank of wood he encountered and enhance it, occasionally leaving flaws and cracks intact. Soon, examples of his pieces appeared in museums as works of art. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City would devote an entire room to its permanent collection of his *oeuvre*.)

Every time George and Richard visited his workshop, they took home discarded pieces of his wood to give as house gifts to their friends. Ours, an ample hunk of black walnut became an indispen-

sable cutting board in our Nantucket kitchen. The Nakashima chair we each sat down on (named 'Conoid', for his studio that was cone shaped) was actually a slab of walnut, cantilevered on two inward slanting legs that rested on long horizontal 'feet' made of the same wood. The legs continued up to the walnut cross-member to form the sides of the back that contained 8 hickory spindles doweled vertically from the seat into the cross-member. The gently arced cross-member itself extended beyond the sides to form what looked to me like the beginning of the top of a Japanese *torii* gate.

Undeniably a work of art, the seat was too long front to back for me and I had to choose between sitting on the edge to eat, which meant straddling a central rise that interfered with my crotch, or all the way back against the spindles and reaching far forward to spill my food. But I managed, with the effects of several previous cocktails, and the dinner went off well. Richard concocted all the meals and George administered them. Sometimes they were rather weird combinations of ingredients, depending how many drinks they'd each imbibed, but the desserts were always marvelous (pastry was Richard's specialty at Pratt) and every one a minor masterpiece.

We finished off the wine and the dinner ended. Our ankles were beginning to feel the cold night air seeping through the cracks of the floor boards. (The woodstove's radius of heat encompassed only the sitting area). While Arthur and I cleared off the table and stacked the dishes in the kitchen, the boys set about making up our bed in the room behind it – the coldest room in the house. Determined that the washing up could wait until morning, we said good night all around, and they climbed unsteadily up the circular stairs to their blue heaven.

Our bedroom contained only a bed. They had placed an electric blanket on top with dual controls resting on the floor. Tired, and a bit crocked, we stepped out of our shoes and pants, but kept underwear, socks and flannel shirts on. Each of us hugged his edge of the bed as if we would fall into Grand Canyon if we moved toward the center. I turned up my control for a start. Before long Arthur restlessly turned his down, complaining his side was too hot. Soon after I found myself shivering with cold and hiked mine up again. In no time he was broiling once more and lowered his. In our semi-stupor, we decided the only way to remedy it was to change places. Padding around on bare feet in the unheated room, we passed, like ships in the Arctic, and settled in each other's side. By then it was

about 3 in the morning and we were both exhausted with hardly a wink of sleep. The new arrangement, after a few attempts, didn't help at all. We yanked the blanket's plug from the wall, pulled on our pants, windbreakers and baseball caps, and crawled into bed again, sitting semi-upright against folded pillows waiting for the first crack of dawn with that recalcitrant blanket up to our chins.

When it was light enough for me to see the rutted road back to town, we tiptoed out with topsiders in hand, wrote a note saying due to unforeseen circumstances we had to return home early – had a great evening – and we'd call next day. I tucked the note under the rim of one of the unwashed (hand-thrown) dishes on the kitchen counter, and left the outer door open a crack so it wouldn't slam shut and waken them as we left.

I released the brake and Arthur and I pushed the station wagon down the grassy incline a ways, before starting the motor. The road back was just as bad as the night before, but I was tackling it in daylight and that made all the difference. Stopping and starting, stopping and starting, swerving around downed branches and plowing through rain sodden ones in an attempt to avoid the deepest mud holes, we reached the main macadam highway about a half hour later and joined the early-bird pickups and vans headed for work in town, as if nothing untoward had happened.

When we reached home, we quickly put our pulsating heads to bed and slept soundly until well after noon. I awoke first and phoned out to Madequecham. George answered and asked if one of us had become ill. Was it the meal? I said that wasn't the problem. I explained what transpired in the night. He seemed only slightly perturbed, but then said they would look into it when they returned from a week's trip off island. No one would be using the room in the meantime. He'd check it out on his return.

When he did call, several weeks later, he expressed humble apologies for the mishap. They carefully examined the blanket and found that they had inadvertently crossed the control boxes in their haste (or inebriated state) – left was right and vice versa. He intimated also that when he told others the story at cocktail time, they were highly amused and said it was on a par with the old Abbott & Costello baseball routine about who's on first. Most of them said it was obvious what had happened. For some reason (inebriation?) it wasn't to us at the time, but we certainly felt foolish later, when the legend made the rounds and became legendary .

Webster's described them as bivalves, each replete with two deeply grooved convex shells and an earlike wing on each side of the hinge, that swam by rapidly snapping their shells together to expel water in a jetlike manner, with a delectably edible interior muscle. I preferred to think of them as discarded sun-rayed beach specimens, vying for collectors. What Webster omitted was that its edible interior muscle, so succulent to some, was anathema to others. Sorry to say, I was one of the latter. All shellfish caused me distress, but scallops could send me reeling. Something about *purine* levels.

Friends and family were long aware of my predicament, and never had them on the menu when I was present. Once in a while I would forget to warn new or casual acquaintances who invited me to dinner, however, and the results could be, well—memorable. The most memorable occasion was at the home of friends of Richard and George from New Jersey. Al and Carol owned the place next door and nearer the edge of the bluff at Madequecham. It was a fairly new 2-story construction, known as an 'upside down', like so many big cliff dwellings that offered fullest vistas of the ocean.

Downstairs contained 4 bedrooms and a bath around the bottom of a stairway that led up to a kitchen-dining area on the right and a spacious airy living room to the left with multiple wide windows and French doors onto the upper deck of a porch along one entire length. A hallway at the bottom of the stairs had a door out to an unscythed back field used for parking.

Dr. Al, dermatologist, was a tall, grey, affable, loud know-it-all with thick glasses, who expected to dominate conversations. Carol, also tall, but far more reticent, had unnatural dark hair, a pleasant face, and an easy laugh. She was good company. It was a second marriage for both, with previous grown offspring. Al flew his own plane back and forth and they spent only a month or so on the island, with occasional weekends until late fall. Their connection with Richard and George was a mutual interest in art, as keen collectors and followers of the contemporary scene.

Typical of city dwellers, country air was more precious than surroundings, and we learned to take along sweaters or jackets, even at the height of the summer, to counter all windows open wide to the elements and the sharp winds off the ocean at day's end, especially upstairs.

It was merely the second or third time Arthur and I had been invited to dinner, and previously along with other guests. Carol, an avowed non-cook, had used caterers then. But on that occasion she boasted that she had prepared the entire meal, and wouldn't reveal what it was until we sat down at table. Meanwhile, we nursed drinks in the living room. Arthur, in a sweater, hunched back-to-against the inevitable gales from all the open apertures. I braved them full frontal across the room in a favorite wraparound beige corduroy jacket that had wide padded shoulders, a tie belt and outside ample patch pockets level with the hips. Very Hollywood 1940. I had seen a similar one on Charlton Heston, the movie star, at an Easter Sunday service at Arthur's church off Times Square, then known for its celebrity parishioners. Annoyed that his tall frame in the pew before me blocked my view of the ceremonies, I concentrated on the width of his shoulders and, later, on the tightly tied casual front drape, like a cut off bathrobe. When I, by luck, came across an exact knockoff at S. Klein's in Union Square, it joined my wardrobe as my current signature item of apparel.

Al passed us a tray of round edibles resembling *sushi* Carol had prepared herself. Arthur and I looked at each other, mouthed a silent 'Lincoln Center' when they weren't looking, and each stifled a snort. The episode harked back to a very fancy opening night intermission reception at that august theater complex in Manhattan. Many well known and formally dressed celebrities were nibbling on an array of

of the Upper East Side.

Arthur and I eventually gravitated to the empty bar along a side wall with our nibbles and bubbly, to observe the “flow” from a critical distance. We spied one actor/waiter touring the boonies at the room’s outer limits holding aloft a tray full of *sushi* items, arranged as decorously as an Oriental garden. But with no takers. Even the vegetarians were freeloading off the carrion like all the other vultures by that time, as if there were no tomorrow.

The young man circled back around several times, passing us with a feigned shrug and sigh – and wink – at the untouched full platter before him. At last he returned and paused long enough to ask in complete and utter mock frustration, ‘Either of you guys want any of this shit?’

It was enough to spew champagne over. Suddenly the whole intermission episode was a big overblown charade. Back inside for the last act of the rather somber play, it was difficult to suppress the urge to burst into laughter at the thought of the lobby encounter. It seemed so much more appropriate to the occasion than anything happening onstage.

Up top at the Upside Down, I did my best to lavish praise on Carol’s concoctions. Truth to tell, they weren’t at all bad. It was just that the ever vivid Lincoln Center incident was brought to mind whenever anything bite-size and raw in won ton wraps was passed around. It prompted knee-jerk re-actions from us both. We couldn’t help it.

When Carol announced dinner was being served, we followed Al to the far end of the room where a trestle table stood up against the wall under a high window and a view north. Arthur and I were seated on one side and Al and Carol on the other, he at the window and she on the outside for ready access to the small galley kitchen behind them. I sat opposite her.

After a commendable salad course, she retreated to the stove to drain – yes, scallops, from the deep fryer. A heaping mound of the the golden nuggets was placed on each plate and delivered with the confession that it was the first time she had ever attempted cooking them. It was then it hit me that I had never warned her about my aversion beforehand.

I looked sideways at Arthur for a sign of help. His eyes fell to my side patch pocket and I knew what to do. While he kept both of them occupied pointing out the window at all the landmarks in the

distance that he feigned ignorance about, (aware from previous experience with *nouveau* Nantucketers that they loved showing off their recently acquired knowledge of everything island), I quickly thrust a handful into the pocket, wiping grease off my fingers with a napkin before their attention reverted, then my mouth for effect.

This was repeated every time it was apparent I should be partaking. Arthur continued pointing further and further out of their eye range until they had to stand and lean close to the windowpane facing away from us. Precious seconds of argument between them about exact locations gave me time to wipe the actual grease from my fingers with the napkin and again pretend to dab at the corners of my mouth at their return. When they finally sighted the distant Sankaty Head Lighthouse, I'd successfully managed to transfer all the scallops from plate to pocket, and was contentedly rubbing my belly in mock sufficiency.

Carol was delighted when she saw my empty dish and offered to cook more. I protested but she insisted. Al droned on about the significance of the lighthouse in World War II at spotting Russian boats near shore, while she reheated the oil for another batch of scallops. (They had bought enough for an army.)

Stifling a yawn with his left hand, Arthur gave a furtive glance sideways at my bulging pocket and his eyes widened. Grease had seeped through the corduroy in a wide dark stain and was about to drip over the edge of the chair. He coughed to get my attention and pointed sideways at it with his free hand below table top level. I had to think fast.

Aloud, Arthur mentioned how unusual that the bathroom would be one flight below where we sat. Al dropped the lighthouse and said he'd fought with the architect to get another one upstairs, but it would mean refiguring the whole house. Carol, happily playing chef from the stove, added that she liked it as it was, so she could get her daily exercise up and down without being aware of it.

Arthur had come to the rescue again. The bathroom, of course. I suddenly decided I had to go badly and excused myself before anybody could look my way. With my left hand holding in the wet patch pocket and the right grasping the railing, I flew down to the bathroom. The first thing I did after closing the door was remove the jacket and scrape the scallops and goo into the toilet bowl. Sure that was all there would be to it, I pressed the flush handle with a big sigh of relief and watched the little golf balls bob about in the

whirlpool and disappear as the water drained.

I straightened up to deal with the jacket, but then, horror of horrors, watched as they all returned with the incoming tide. Not one of them had gone away. In desperation I frantically flushed several more times to no avail. I had been chilly upstairs, but I was wiping a very sweaty brow in that torture chamber at the moment, wondering what to do next.

In the end I fished every last one of the little buggers out using reams of toilet paper to wrap them in and carried the soggy mass to my car, where it was tossed into the back seat, and, then on second thought, to the floor. I mentally blessed the architect for insisting the john remain where it was, downstairs, off the hallway, near the exit.

Then, what to do with the jacket? I couldn't don it again and go back to the table with grease still dripping from the leaking pocket. I threw it on top of the rest and figured to deal with it later at home. On the way back upstairs I quickly concocted a reason:

The food and drink had made me so warm, I didn't need it and had run it to the car to get it out of the way. Nobody blinked.

Because Arthur and I had felt chilled from all the open windows and gusts of sea air since the moment we'd arrived anyway, I had to pull a convincing act of seeming comfortable in short sleeves while hugging myself to keep the shivering from being too apparent, and sporting a permanently clenched smile to keep my teeth from chattering too loudly.

Thankfully I hadn't been asked to eat any more scallops, but the dessert of frozen sherbet didn't warm any cockles, nor did the minted iced tea that washed it down. What finally saved the day was the night. We had to hit the rutted road home before dark. In "The Ten Commandments" Charlton Heston parted the Red Sea. But no miracle could save his look-alike jacket. It trailed the bundle of bivalves to the town dump. An old photo of me in it was kept by the phone as a reminder (and remembrance) of things past..

The place was as dingy and drab as backstage at a moribund Burlesque Theater, which was not so strange, since it produced all the necessary material for the fans used by strippers in such places back in the day. The realm of the feather merchant, or in that case feather merchants, it was an endangered species about to go the way of the dinosaur.

In fact, it was the last of its kind in the once thriving area of midtown Manhattan that catered to the special needs of theatrical enterprises a few blocks north around Times Square.

Situated on 37th Street alongside commercial fabric houses, bead emporia and nuptial design studios, it didn't even have a name sign outside or any indication of the specialty products contained therein. Storefront windows were barren of everything except rolls of corrugated cardboard and yellowed sheets of newspaper.



Once inside, a couple naked light bulbs on stands, like those left on stages in theaters overnight, stood before stacks of long slender boxes piled to the ceiling with ladders in each row. There were no other clues. You simply had to *know* what you were there for. And what I was there for was to purchase long black and white ostrich feathers, six of each, to complete a satirical sculpture I was making of just such a creature in an animal series for a forthcoming show.

I'd learned about the shop from my theater sources and told to expect a unique experience. After closing the door that had a loud clanging bell attached, two figures approached Arthur and me from the depths of the stacks. We were dumbfounded. They were not quite midgets, but very small twins, cookie-cutter identical with flowing white beards and skull caps perched precariously on the backs of bald pates. Both wore workmen's blue shirts with suspenders that pulled the tops of their pants up to their chests.

"So, vuttya vant?" asked the one on the right. I told him and the other twin disappeared into the grayness. We followed the first one

as he went to answer a phone call in a tiny office to one side, and marveled at the array of faded glossies of former customers pinned to the bulletin board. They formed a who's who of the greatest and least of a century of ecdysiasts – some of whom wouldn't have had an inkling that was what strippers would be called after H.L.Menken coined the word in 1940. (From the Greek *ekdysis*, meaning strip away or molt, he did it at the request of Gypsy Rose Lee who asked for a more dignified word for her profession.)

There was one picture and name I recognized from far back in my childhood: Sally Rand and her famous fan dance. When I was about 8 and my brother several years younger, our mother took us on the trolley from our home in suburban Campello to Brockton Fair, one of the oldest and biggest yearly events in Massachusetts held every 4th of July week since the mid-1800s. It was magical to us in 1937, and never more so than when we sat in the high-tiered stadium to watch the glittering outdoor stage show headed by Paul Whiteman and his orchestra. One of the first acts was a group of 6 very buxom young women who danced on their toes in wonderful frou frou pink tutus. Billed as the Dancing Rosebuds, they were at first derided and booed by the crowd for their sizes when they first came onstage. But they won over the hot dog chompers with their artistry and were cheered and applauded by the time the act was finished and, I remembered, returned for several bouncy encores.

But the attraction everyone was waiting for was Sally Rand. We didn't know why. Out came a little lady with two enormous ostrich fans (they were each 7 feet long, pink, and made to order by our 37th Street elves, we would learn). She kept switching one with the other, front and back, as she circled around to the music. We thought it was pretty dumb, but the crowd went hysterical whenever she made a change and they caught the flash of a bare hip and leg. Bored, we took turns playing slap each other's knees while waiting for the real thrill – auto speed racing.

Sally Rand, real name Helen Gould Beck, was born in Hickory County, Missouri in 1904, the bio under the photo read. She left home at 13 to work as a cigarette girl in Kansas City, then toured with a circus and vaudeville act under the name of Wampas Baby Star. She made a number of silent films in Hollywood until talkies Xed that career for good. It turned out she had a lisp.

Her great breakthrough however was at the 1933 World's Fair in Chicago. She and her fan dance took the place by storm. People

who reminisced about that fair later might have been dim about describing some of the highlights on the midway, but agreed the one thing remembered clearly by all was that lady and that dance.

Sally Rand, with or without her giant ostrich plumes, became a noted national celebrity after that and continued dancing into her 70s. Once she was interviewed alongside Martha Graham, the all reigning queen of high tone interpretive dance. The condescending Miss Graham said to her in a catty aside that she should learn to bare her soul, to which Rand replied, "Say, I gotta keep *something* covered." She died an iconic legend in 1979.

The other twin returned from the gloom with two long boxes in tow and set them on a table, one marked OS WHITE, the other OS BLACK. He was about to open them when a flutter of commotion was heard at the door. "Dahlings!" cried the two ladies as they entered breathlessly. The twins left us and ran to them, all kissie kissie and sweetie pies. The mutual love fest continued for minutes, amid much fluttering of hands and raucous laughter. We had been completely forgotten. So we leaned against the table and took it all in, thoroughly amused.

It seemed they were both still active strippers even though they had clearly been around the block more times than either would care to admit. They wore big fluffy fur coats of questionable origin that disguised any minor telltale signs of ageing. Both still had to-die-for gorgeous gams, however, that they knew how to display in what we called drop-dead-Joan-Crawford-fuck-me shoes: platform soles, impossible heels and ankle straps. Their makeup was applied perfectly, with just enough mouth and eye exaggeration to set them apart as stage folk.

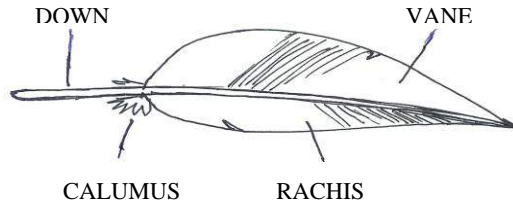
It reminded me of going to church in the little town of Medway, Mass. as a kid, seated in a congregation of staid everyday neighbors, and having the Vardo family appear and sit in a forward pew. They were an accordion act that traveled the Keith Vaudeville Circuit, but had a small bright blue bungalow off Main Street to retreat to between gigs. They were a father, mother and son, but Madame Vardo, as she was addressed, was the one no one could keep eyes from. Striking but not beautiful, she had what my mother deemed "flavor" (I think she meant "flair"): never flashy, but almost; upswept hair blonde but not brassy; made up to be seen from a distance but not far. She radiated stage presence without a word spoken. Even at my tender age she represented the glamorous

world I knew I longed to be part of, but felt forever alienated by my backwater plight.

Another round of laughter from the strippers and the twins cut short my reverie. They were then discussing conditions on the road as entertainers at that point in time. The shorter and wider lady was informing the others of her recent tour of one week stands around the southwest.. Complaining that “strippin ain’t what it used be”, she went on, “Don’t play Waco, for one. They’re dead there. I ‘m not talkin’ ‘bout the dirty old men who play with theirselves under folded raincoats or such. What I can’t stand is the ones who snore so loud during a performance, you have-ta yell at ‘em to shut the f up. Now that shows downright disrespect fo’the performin’ artist.”

The taller one with the big features said she would agree “one hunert percent”, and gave a few vivid examples of her latest gigs on the road. Finally acknowledging that we were probably not just hanging around there for kicks, they told the twins to go ahead and take care of our order first. The runner twin hurried away into the depths to bring out selections that the “girls” might want to look over in the meantime.

Our two boxes had lids carefully lifted off, and the first elf reached into the black one for a plume with one thumb and forefinger, like a Victorian spinster with a teacup, keeping the other digits aloft and out of harm’s way. He explained that fingerprints could do irreparable damage to feathers with their oil. He slid the feather out horizontally, describing its basic anatomy as he went:



He stopped to sketch a drawing of a typical feather and its parts on a piece of wrapping paper, further explaining that the ostrich *vanes* and *rachises* extended far out from the normal stem and curled under loosely. The test of an ostrich plume was its springiness and ability to recoil immediately. He showed by bending its tip all the way back to the *down* and letting go. We followed suit with the others in the box using handkerchiefs. Gloved ecdysiastic applause from the end of the table greeted our success. The ladies, old pros

at the procedure, had drawn the gloves out of their bags in anticipation of their own plume inspection.

As we continued our testing process with the box of whites, the taller one placed one hand on her hip and the other fist down on the table and inquired as to what we planned to do with them. When I told her, she said, faking relief, that she thought maybe we were about to muscle in on their territory, reduced as it was. "Ya know, 'the pie ain't getting any bigger, boys, and the slices, they're gettin' thinner. What kind of strippers do you think these guys'd make, Floss?" Floss let out a loud hoot and laughed, "Lousy. They're too puny." Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum giggled into their palms.

With that, they all lifted pink and purple plumes from the box at their end of the table, and, swaying them aloft, began bumping and grinding in a conga line, bellowing 'The Stripper' song in unison:

. "dah dah dah, boom, da dah dah dah, boom....."

until they collapsed back where they started in a convulsive heap, the twins re-adjusting their yarmulkes and the ladies their hairdos.

Arthur and I did the applauding then. Floss made a little curtsy and cooed: "No sir charge, gents." The elves pulled themselves together quickly and became no nonsense feather merchants again. All business. To us: "Ya vant heff dozen bleck, heff dozen vite?" We did, and they disappeared back somewhere with the boxes.

Having then become quite chummy with the "pasty" ladies, I asked, referring to the photos and bios on the bulletin board, if they were acquainted with any of them. Oh, yah, they said, most of 'em. Did they ever work with, say, Gypsy Rose Lee? Lordee no, not in the same league. "We're nickels and dimes. She's big bucks. You won't find her picher up there. Besides she strip *-teased*, meaning she never took it all off. Strippers might go all the way. Depends."

I left that where it was. Arthur wanted to know how long they thought they could keep doing what they did. As long as the legs held up, sugar, they answered in unison. You could even have arthritis and deaden it with pain killers, but when legs became boiled dinners, you were a goner. Luckily, as they both pointed out, hoisting their hemlines, they had a few good years yet, agreed? Agreed.

The miniature merchants returned with long slim packages of plumes for both parties (the ladies had been there to replace a few that had shed, the scourge of all strippers, since it provoked ri-

dicule and laughter, and screwed up their timing) . I paid my bill. It made me blanch when I read it – 10 bucks a plume. \$120 total. Boy, that sculpture had better sell, I worried. We parted company after having had a most unusual and entertaining afternoon with all involved. It was, in a perverse sense, educational.

Four years later I happened onto that street again. Not remembering the number, I scoured the entire north side between 6th and 5th Avenues, but found no feather fairies. They must have returned to Brigadoon – or to wherever Jewish elves vanished. I kept the names of the *artistes* for awhile but never came across them in Variety. As for the sculpture (titled *Mother Was a Stripper*), it was subsequently sold by a Madison Avenue gallery, but it was never clear to whom, exactly. The reason was that I didn't follow up on the purchase until those four years later when I began assembling notes for this piece, and couldn't find the original invoice from that gallery. It had folded its tents and moved to California. So for what it was worth, I decided instead to include here the heresay information I remembered from contact with the gallery owner at the time: I got an excited call from her that Beatle John Lennon had been in the gallery with his wife Yoko Ono and was looking for a piece of art appropriate for their new young son Sean's bedroom.

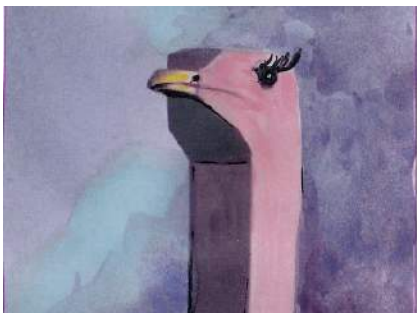
. They had been in several times to look at the ostrich. They believed it was a stork. They asked a friend, and one of Sean's godfathers, artist Andy Warhol, to go look at it, and give them his opinion. He said it was charming and certainly suitable for a son's bedroom, but it was not a stork, but an ostrich. Oh well. The gal from the gallery said they loved it anyway and told her they would definitely be back. (Didn't they all!)

The sculpture was subsequently sold, but so many other things were happening in my life at the time, I couldn't remember if they were the buyers or not, and like the strippers with Gypsy Rose Lee, I was not in their league, so had no reasonable way of finding out. However, the story was so good, I attached it to that sculpture anyway as a kind of tag line. And so it remained.

When my parents retired from Massachusetts to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Arthur and I would drive down from New York yearly to visit. On some of the long stretches – Virginia to the Carolinas say – we amused ourselves by coming up with the names of

all the famous burlesque strippers we could think of that had some connection with one particular subject at a time, such as Weather, Universe, Natural Disasters, etc. We found we could come up with a goodly number in most categories. A few whose photo shots also graced the old feather merchants' bulletin board and had, like my memory of them, not entirely faded, included:

Eartha Quake
Blaze Starr
Lava Hott
Tempest Storm
Dawn Star
April Daye
Atoma Cyclone
Anne Tartic



Rita Raynebow
Sunny Whether
Tar-a Pitts
Vicky Volcano
Ophelia Flame
Autumn Rayne
Crystal Gail
Tequila Sunrise

Flora Da Hurricane

Then there were the clever and *double entendre* suggestive ones like: Takya Vestoff, Claire Voyant, Anne Chovy, Daisy Chayne, Erin Go Braugh-less, Butt Floss-y, Melba The Toast of the Town, Chas- titty Belt, Hope Chest; plus a lone male – Lightnin' Rod.

Lee (not Gypsy) was a friend, or rather a fair weather one, for she only dropped down to visit at my summer gallery on Old South Wharf, Nantucket Island on sunny days. But on such days we'd sit under the shade of my locust tree outside and chat and laugh and laugh some more. She was a writer of verse, a church organist, and had the funniest smutty jokes I'd ever heard. One day we got onto the subject of burlesque and strippers, and she told about her days as a student at NYU, and how she and chums would pool their cash and rent a car to go over to Minsky's Theater in Newark, but only when a certain stripper was appearing there. Not because she was so great. She was awful, and gross looking. They went to see her because of her name, so they could go back to the dorms and joke about it for days. Deceptively simple, a 2-word 'bodice ripper':

HELEN BED

On long or boring trips, Arthur and I expanded the ‘Weather Stripper’ naming contest – that by then also included Gale Forceps, Foggy Bottom and Crack o’ Dawn – to include lists of clever one-of-a-kind shop signs encountered en route. Some of the best tickled a funny bone or two years later: a purveyor of religious objects was called ‘Altar Egos’; an optician, ‘My Optics’; garden center, ‘A Growing Concern’; skin care boutique, ‘A Glowing Concern’; fast food Indian restaurant, ‘Curry in a Hurry’; a theatrical scenery making studio, ‘Fore Play’; and my favorite, a short-lived men’s casual wear shop that stood beside the famously infamous old Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village (that featured its own cross-dressing ecdysiaists) – ‘Denim Iniquity’. Then there were restaurant signs encountered that pandered (pleaded?) to every possible taste, like the flashing neon one insistent on being “Fall River’s Only Cuban Chinese Italianate Dining Bistro – Tuesday: Swedish Meatballs:”

In all our traveling days, Arthur not only offered companionship, but also a keen sense of humor and appreciation of the ridiculous. He needed it. Born Charles Arthur Schaefer in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, in 1913, he grew up in the hardscrabble existence before, during and after the Great Depression, in the squat communities teetering along the wide bend of the Beaver River just before it emptied into the Ohio, within the acrid shadows of giant steel mills northwest of Pittsburgh. When the furnaces roared, everyone ate. When they went dormant, everyone struggled. His neighborhood was a place of narrow numbered streets, mean rental dwellings, no real yards, and few pretensions. A humble way of life with few prospects, and he hated it. The Rust Belt.

One example of his plight was when his high school prom came around. He was unable to attend because the seat of his only good pair of pants was so heavily patched. (Fortunately he could show up for his diploma as the salutatorian of his class at graduation, for it was hidden under a gown. But none of his family was there.)

He worked for nearly a decade in one of the steel pipe manufacturing factories, all the while studying for a bachelor’s degree at nearby Geneva College evenings. That was interrupted by a call from Uncle Sam, and he was inducted into the army. He believed that if World War II hadn’t happened, he might never have had the incentive to broaden his horizons.

As it turned out, he was deployed to Morocco, then Algeria and

Tunisia. He sailed by boat from Tunis to Salerno, south of Naples, and eventually shipped out from there to Corsica. In all those areas he was close to the fighting, but acted in each as an office worker safely behind the lines, mainly because he could type. He acted in the same capacity at his final destination, Marseille. Although he had many tales to tell about each port of call, it was Marseille that he remembered most – almost fondly.

Perhaps because Marseille meant the end of the war for him, or maybe it was there that he had the one experience he was to recall most vividly and relate with the most relish in the many long years to come. Because he could speak a little French, and more importantly, understand it, his superior put him in charge of a laundromat, of all things, in the basement of an abandoned private boys' school, where laundering facilities already existed. His officer thought it a great idea for the servicemen to have their own nearby place for such a function.

So Corporal Arthur dug in, so to speak, and got the place up and running, hiring local French women as laundresses. All went along swimmingly, or so Arthur thought, until one day his superior suddenly reappeared with a bit of alarming news: the costs for running the place were skyrocketing, and he was there to go over the books and find out why. A close inspection showed that the amounts of soap being purchased were escalating daily, and, of course, the reason was because the women were pilfering bars and hiding them in their bosoms to be sold on the street. Soap, as it turned out in those desperate topsy turvy times, had more value than gold.

So Arthur – or Whitey, as he was called all through the war for his light blond hair – returned to office clerk, and was kept in Marseille long after his unit had returned to the States. With little to do, he made trips throughout France and eventually took classes at the American University in Paris. During that time he visited friends in London, took more classes there (the invitations came to his desk for distribution, so he gave them to himself), and even ended up as an extra in the first postwar blockbuster movie made in England, *Caesar and Cleopatra* (mentioned in the earlier short story 'Cattle Call').

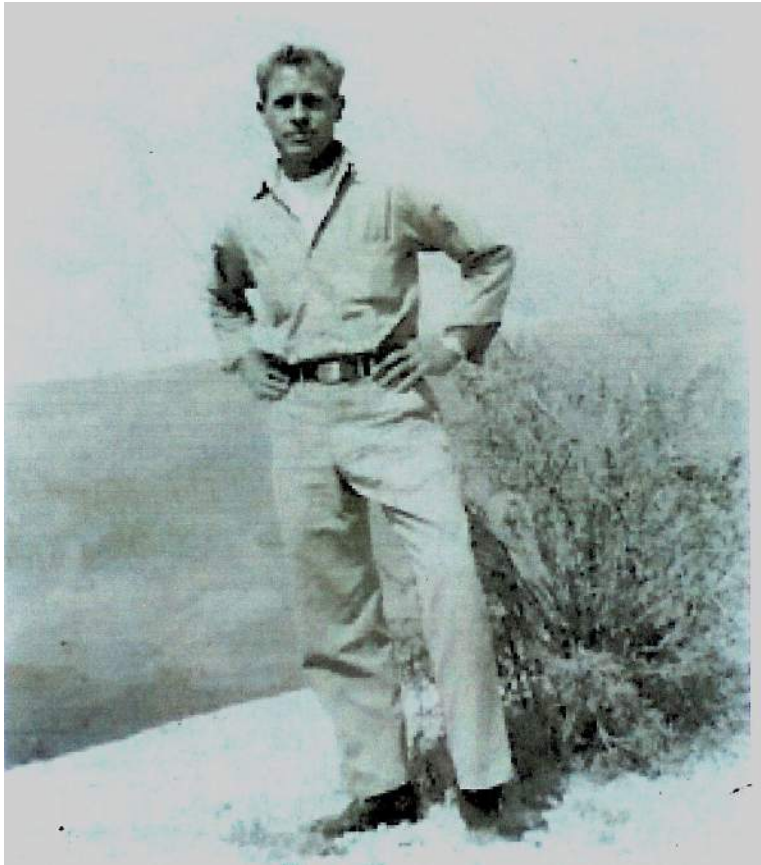
When he did return home, he felt he had outgrown Beaver Falls and, after briefly commuting to Pittsburgh to work, he moved to Cleveland to live with his Aunt Carrie and her daughter Millie who found him a job where she was employed. He finished studying for

a bachelor degree nights at Western Reserve. Aside from sporadic visits to see his parents and three sisters, and later to attend their funerals, he never returned to his home town. But he relived life there almost every night for the rest of his life in vivid, haunting dreams he couldn't begin to explain.

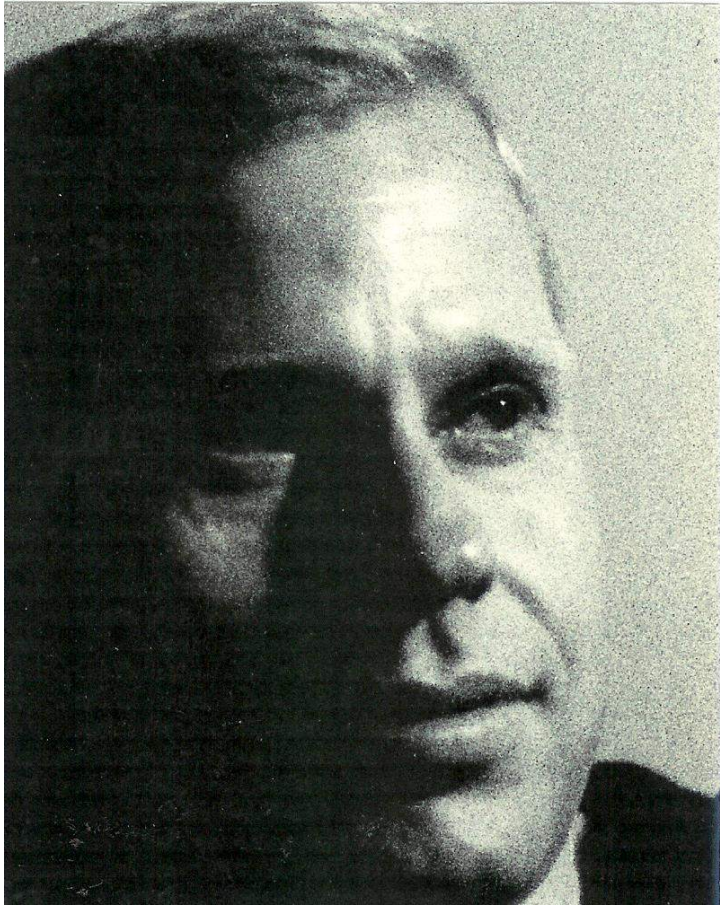
From Cleveland he moved to Manhattan, where he earned a master's in economics at Columbia University, and then settled into a career with the New York City Housing Authority. Big city living suited him fine, but, for all his acquired cosmopolitan trappings he still thought, acted and looked like a small-town boy, right down to the unruly blond cowlick and the gap between his two front teeth. He was a genuinely good person in the rather old-fashioned sense: devoutly religious, but not sanctimonious; caring (he never knowingly hurt anyone in his life); generous; resolutely – sometimes painfully – honest; and he had the buoyantly cheerful disposition of someone who awoke every morning with a song, even if some of the unremembered lyrics had to be improvised and the tune wandered off after a few bars.

As it turned out, Arthur needed all the buoyancy and good spirits he could muster, for when the song ended, he had to rise from his bed and face the day, and that was when the problems began. He was a walking embodiment of Murphy's Law. Bad luck followed him like a tail, and he was highly accident prone. Carrying a loaded tray across a cafeteria was fraught with the same peril as that of a high-wire circus act. When he sat down to eat, a calculated portion of the meal was guaranteed to land on his shirtfront – the same shirt he very likely would give you off his back. Stopping to smell the flowers often meant falling into them.

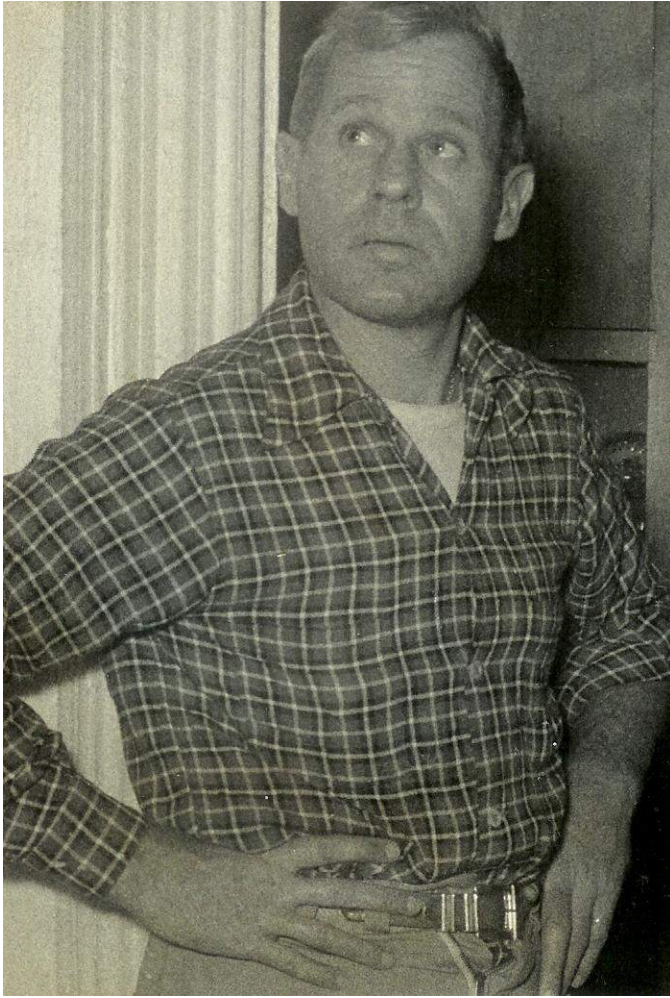
Once, on a blisteringly hot summer day, he was seated in an air-conditioned subway express train on the way home to Greenwich Village from his office in East Harlem. On his lap was a package of frozen calf liver he'd bought on sale at an uptown market. It was a long crowded trip with many delays, and he became engrossed in a paperback mystery. When the train reached 42nd Street many of the rush-hour standees who had been packed in like sardines exited, and for the first time he could see the passengers who were seated across from him. A middle-aged woman directly opposite looked up from her magazine at him and suddenly screamed. She seemed to be on the verge of collapse. Everyone stared at her and then to where she was pointing – Arthur's crotch.



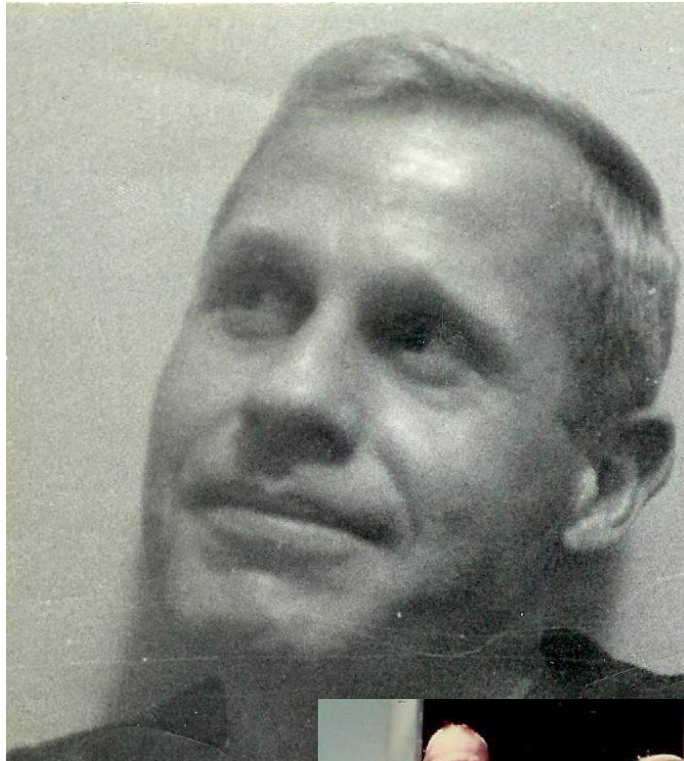
Arthur Schaefer at Grand Canyon 1952



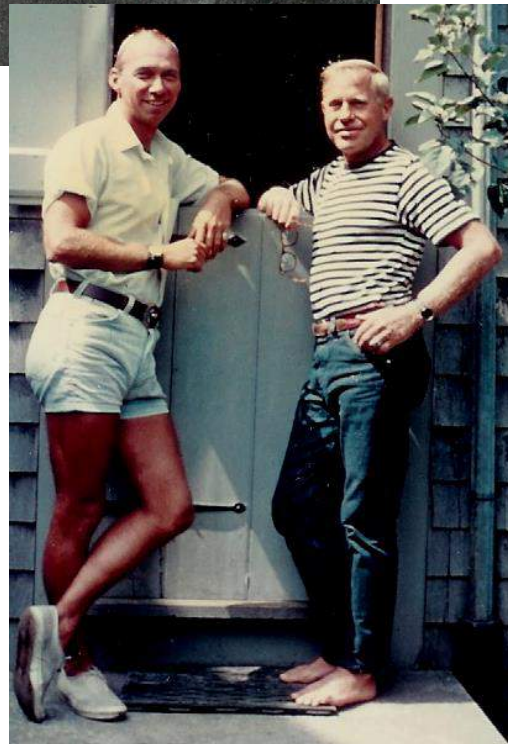
(Charles) Arthur Schaefer New York City 1971



Arthur in Our Greenwich Village Apartment 1966



Above: Arthur 1968



Right: Donn & Arthur
Nantucket Island 1969

There, on the wedge of seat between his spread thighs was a sickening pool of blood that was beginning to drip over the edge and down onto his socks and shoes. He had forgotten about the liver on his lap. It had unfrozen and was soaking through the waxed wrapping and brown bag. Mortified, he lifted the package up to show that the liquid was coming from it, not him. The blood spilled more, streaking down his pant legs and onto the floor. The poor woman screamed again as fellow passengers rushed to console her.

Embarrassed beyond belief, Arthur hurriedly left the train at the next station stop, 34th Street, rushed upstairs holding it at arm's length in front of him and tossed the soggy mess into the nearest trash can. By then his hands and cuffs were drenched. He tried wiping them off with a newspaper sheet from the bin, saving the rest of the paper to cover lap and legs on the ride home.

As if bad luck and being accident prone weren't sufficient enough afflictions, Arthur was also plagued by absent-mindedness as well. Not the average occasional forgetfulness most others endured, but the severe form stereotypically attributed to preoccupied professors (although he was a wiz at mental calculation, the one we usually handed the check to divvy up when a group dined out). Apparently it ran in the family. His sisters were always relating incidents about themselves, accompanied by headshaking and "You-won't-believe what-I-did" fits of laughter. One Thanksgiving all the relatives were invited to sister Alice's house for dinner. She'd prepare everything but the turkey, which sister Nellie was to roast and bring over. That morning Nellie dutifully placed the bird in the oven, made note of the time she was to take it out, and left her own house to walk the few blocks to Alice's to join the others, intending to go back for the bird when it was done. Just before it was time to sit down, Nellie scooted back home, but immediately returned empty-handed. She'd forgotten to light the oven. The bird was still rock-solid. More shrugged shoulders and 'wouldn't you know'. They all sat down to a feast of nothing but fixin's and pie.

Chagrined but undaunted, Nellie determined that, since she had it, she would cook the turkey the next day anyway. She made sure to turn the oven on before going out to do errands. Needless to say she then stopped off at her sister's to help clean up. They got carried away with chit chat and what not and forgot the time. She arrived back only to find her house full of smoke and the poor bird incinerated. She spread the ashes in the driveway.

Arthur had few food tales to relate since he was generally uninterested in the subject. He ate because he had to, except when it came to desserts. He could make a meal out of them. When he got out of the service he devoured apple pie and ice cream every morning as breakfast for a solid year! He did have keen interest in trains and train travel, however, and accrued a number of relevant mishap adventure stories from it.

One of the best occurred when he was returning to New York from Pittsburgh after a holiday weekend. The train was not only crowded with returning travelers, some having to stand in the aisle for the entire trip, but also the air-conditioning wasn't working at all and no windows would open. Passengers were stripping down to undershirts and slips and fanning themselves with newspapers and magazines. No conductors were in sight, of course.

Arthur inched his way to the vestibule between cars, where he was able to thrust his shoulders and head out above the retaining gate to face the cool wind streaming past the side of the train. Every once in a while refreshing liquid sprays accompanied the wind and soaked his face and neck. It felt wonderful. He remained in that position for the entire journey, closing his eyes to welcome each soothing splash..

When he arrived at our New York apartment, his face was almost black, not only from accumulated soot, but also, he realized, from the flushing of the toilet at the rear of the car up ahead that he had to forego using in order to maintain his exalted position. He made a beeline for our bathroom to shower. It required several to wash away the accumulation, and one more to erase the concept.

When he retired from the NYCHA in the mid-70s, he no longer had the old familiar routine schedule to guide him. So his absent-mindedness became more pronounced. He was often diverted from his course by such distractions as: impromptu invitations to play bridge, engrossing crossword puzzles, and good books, which were his passion. Some days he would simply set out for one particular destination, get part way there, forget where he was headed, and have to return home and start over, with directions written by me.

Airports seemed to become more and more like intergalactic space stations. He was totally befuddled by them. One afternoon he was at La Guardia Airport for a flight to Pittsburgh. He checked in, but didn't pay attention to where the attendant told him to go. When he got to the gate area, he looked at his ticket and saw a big

18 penciled on it. Assuming that was the gate number, he walked to that bay. He was mildly surprised that there were no other passengers around, but he'd been on half-empty flights to Pittsburgh before and thought no more of it. He put his bag down, removed an overcoat, and settled into a chair with a new mystery thriller.

Two hours later he looked up and realized he not only had misread the ticket – the 18 was the flight number – he was also in the wrong waiting area. By then his nieces, who were waiting to pick him up, had been paging him frantically for an hour at the Pittsburgh airport. He finally made another connection. He almost always did eventually, but it was never easy. People close to him, all who had their own 'Arthur Stories', became very protective. Carol dubbed him 'Everybody's Teddy Bear'. Leslie liked telling her story about an incident in a restaurant he frequented for breakfast: When his party was seated, his favorite waitress, Diane, took each order in rotation and when she got to Arthur and asked, he said, "Oh, I'll have the usual. (pause) What is it?" She knew. He got a toasted bagel and coffee, butter on the side. No problem.

What sustained him through all that was a wonderful quirky humor that I was lucky enough to share. But he also possessed a condition known as *malapropism* that was to make him even more endearing and fun to be around. Malapropism? It derived from a humorous character named Mrs. Malaprop in a 1775 play by Richard Sheridan titled 'The Rivals'. In it she tries to impress her colleagues into thinking she is more erudite than she really is by the use of long words that are entirely wrong, but sound right.

The Random House Dictionary put it thus:

*The habit of misusing words ridiculously,
especially by the confusion of words that
are similar in sound but not meaning, as
in: "Lead the way and we'll precede."*

In Arthur's case, he was not trying to impress anyone with his fine command of the English language. It was his absentmindedness that caused him to momentarily forget the correct words or phrases in conversation, so he came up with instant similar sounding ones that worked fine in his mind, but produced some comical effects in the ears of listeners (although the amusing thing was that his wild misuses came closer to describing persons, places and conditions often more accurately and vividly than the intended ones).

I gave an informal lecture about my adventures in the Off Off

Broadway Theater arena one evening in 1996 in conjunction with the publication of the book ‘Avant-Guardian.1965-1990; A Theater Foundation Director’s 25 Years Off Broadway’. It was held in a hall on Nantucket Island with proceeds going to the local theatre company. In the sold-out crowd was a number of individuals who knew Arthur and me from years of operating a summer art gallery downtown, so many were aware of his distinctive proclivity. I decided to include that section of the book that dealt with his most colorful reactions to a few of the performances he agreed to attend. (Most of the experimental theater productions sponsored by the foundation I directed were anathema to him. He dismissed them as “boring crap”.)

Included here are excerpts from that 1996 event, and the reactions of the audience:

Me speaking –

“..... Arthur and I attended a Carnegie Hall recital together one Sunday matinee, of what I anticipated to be a spirited, virulent program of Franz Schubert *lieder* sung by the world renowned German baritone whose voice on recordings I had long admired and was anxious to hear in person, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.(pronounced Dis-cow). Because of his popularity, the only seats we could procure at the last minute were up, way up, in the 2nd balcony, and far over to the left. It was stifling hot.

Arthur grumbled about our location and sat on his folded overcoat to see better. Unfortunately Herr Fischer-Dieskau had chosen to sing mostly tender lullabies at ‘half voice’ most of the time and could seldom be heard from our exalted perch. So we nodded off through a fair portion of the recital. After the last return bow, we arose and, as we were pulling on our coats, Arthur leaned over the rail and said aloud to no one in particular out there:

‘No more. I’ve heard enough of that DIRTY FISHY DISCOUNT’”
(Scattered mild laughter)

“ Just the other day I heard him mention something about that very short 19th century French painter, SCREW LOOSE LAUTREC””
(More intense laughter, less scattered)

“.....We were both introduced to the work of the young up and coming dancer/choreographer named Twyla Tharp and her dance company long before her tongue-twister name became well known

in the entertainment world. Arthur especially liked her flip, nose-thumbing slouch style. Several days after attending a performance I heard him excitedly telling of the experience to someone on the phone. The other party must have asked, “Who?” when he mentioned her name, for he repeated more loudly,

‘You know. The dancer – THYLA TWERP.’”

(Bursts of yelps and scattered applause)

“Watching the Winter Olympics on TV one year, he saw a young Italian skier execute a perfect slalom run and exclaimed:

‘Now that’s what I call SALAMI skiing!’”

(Much laughter and knee thumping)

“.....In 1968 Arthur and I saw a work that was a stunning compilation of the past decade’s avant-garde preoccupations – a sort of theatrical wrap-up of the best and worst prevailing trends. It was a piece by director-auteur Richard Schechner called ‘Dionysis in 69’ at the Performing Garage on lower Wooster Street in the Soho district of Manhattan. Presented by The Performance Group that was founded in 1967, it was a reworking of Euripedes *Bacchae*, with a lot of the original text altered to reflect present-day concerns.

It was voiced in the vernacular and, as much as possible, choreographed with physical movements that formed living ‘word-pictures’, with the actors moving out of character at times to comment on the proceedings in their own words, and to encourage audience participation to discourse or physically join in.

Schechner, a long time editor of *The Drama Review*, had become one of Off Off Broadway’s most articulate directors, and a pioneer in developing environmental theater. At his garage (in actuality a one-time real one where old trucks had once been repaired) nestled in a dim ancient cobblestoned neighborhood of blackened warehouses just north of Canal Street, he worked at designing multi-level platforms, ramps, balconies and scaffolding where actors and audience could intermingle. The stage was, then, the entire interior space. He once wrote, ‘Theater is an unliterary art, a here and now experience...’

For that performance, theatergoers were gently eased into the new concept by first, on arrival, being requested to remove their shoes and stoop low through a hole in the door to reach the performing area. We entered a strange dark world of jutting thrusts

and multi-leveled planes, and were told to sit anywhere we liked as long as it wasn't in the chalked performing aisle. I chose a high open balcony. Some chose the floor. Arthur was led to a low stool all alone at center stage.

The actors filed in from the wings, barefoot and dressed alike in knee length sleeveless gauze tunics that made it very clear they were wearing nothing underneath. Flute-y music was piped in from above as they formed groups to begin the piece. The plot of 'Dionysus in 69' centered on the orgiastic ritual of the reenactment of the rebirth of Dionysus (also known as Bacchus), the Greek god of wine and vegetation who, by tradition, died every winter and was reborn each spring. Kind and gentle to those who paid him proper homage, he wreaked vengeance on those who spurned him or his seasonal rites, by causing them to go mad. April was chosen for the five-day festival of dancing, carousing, nude debauchery, drunkenness, etc. – the origin of the maxim: Eat, drink and be merry....etc. All this was celebrated, vividly of course, in Schechner's steamy production.

On the lower platforms and the stage, actors each chose one audience member to relate to personally and returned to that person after each "number" with the cast. Arthur, as I noticed from above, was having a "perfectly lovely" private conversation with a comely young female actress who had squatted beside him on each return and they at times even held hands.

At length she rose to join the others in forming a double line across the length of the stage directly in front of Arthur. At the blast of a ram's horn, or some such early trumpet-like instrument, those in line turned to face each other and dropped their tunics to the floor. It was perfectly clear what we surmised all along – they were all buck naked, backsides glistening. The partners bent forward and clasped hands to make large hoops with their arms. That formed a tunnel – a fallopian tube, as it were – through which the lead actor playing Dionysus, greased like a pig, was passed horizontally with much writhing and grunting. He finally made it to the, well, exit, and had a great cloak thrown upon him and a crown of grapes on his head. Holding aloft a huge beaker of wine he went through the audience exhorting all to join in the merriment. Dancing, singing and drinking (jug wine) followed, the playgoers all making complete asses of themselves in street clothes.

That was all I saw of the play. Audience participation was never

my thing. I climbed down to earth to retrieve Arthur. He seemed to have been mesmerized by all that nudity. When his young partner rose for the ‘fallopian tube’ number, she had bent away from him with her ample buttocks practically in his nose. He tried looking right and then looking left, but all he saw was more buttock, so he ended up staring straight ahead. He missed the rest of the scene.

When we reached the silence of the dark street outside, he paused and said, ‘You know that girl I was talking with in there? She was very sweet, but had a big problem. As she bent over to do that tunnel thing, I couldn’t help but notice that she had the worst case of POLAROIDs I’ve ever seen, and oughtta see a doctor about it.’”

(The Nantucket audience went wild at that: much laughter, stamping of feet, and shouts of ARTHUR! ARTHUR! [I hoped it was partly for my delivery]. The ones seated nearest to him turned and applauded with hands held high. It was a good 3 or 4 minutes before I was able to regain their attention. Arthur was pink with embarrassment. When I’d approached him earlier about using some of his lines, he was reluctant at first, as if hoarding them like crown jewels, then gave in and said, ‘But only a few. Nobody is that interested in my dumb stories.’ Their enthusiasm proved him wrong.

A champagne reception was held afterward at the Jared Coffin House, an inn up the street. By the time I had changed clothes and made my appearance there, Arthur was the center of attention, the undisputed star of the evening. I couldn’t have been happier, and raised my glass with the others in celebration and pride. To use a phrase Mister Malaprop, himself, might have come up with – it was all very

[mal] `a prop-os.)

Mister Malaprop, Meet Mrs. Malaprop

Arthur and I, at the time of this writing, had been partners 58 years. We first met in 1952 during the week of July 4th at an outdoor concert at the storied Lewisohn Stadium at 136th Street and Amsterdam Avenue in New York City’s West Harlem. A gift from Adolph Lewisohn in 1915 to City College, it was a ‘dream’ amphi-

theater he envisioned of one he'd seen in Rome, therefore in grand Greco-Roman style. Designed to hold at least 25,000, it consisted of an enormous arena on which ball games could be – and were – played. For summer concerts it had a vast seating capacity (wooden folding chairs) on the ground level, with room for some small tables and chairs hugging a stage that could hold a full symphony orchestra, namely the New York Philharmonic in white mufti.

Out front, wide granite tiers rose around the arena, supporting an encircling colonnade that towered above the surrounding huddled tenements. We usually dropped our cushions on the jutting corners of the square bases with our backs up against the curves of the great columns. I always arranged to arrive in plenty of time to be among the first in the entry queue, since they were the choice locations for anyone who had attended previous concerts and got stuck sitting on the open tiers with no place to rest your back but against the hirsute pins of some bloke on the next tier above and behind. The pillars cost the same as the tiers – 25 cents. So?

I noticed the fellow who almost always occupied the same location one column over. His shock of startling blond hair was like a landmark that could be spotted from a great distance. There was a certain quiet loneliness about him. We nodded on arrival, then each settled into book reading until the concerts began. By the time of intermission, there was such a hullabaloo of bodies pushing and shoving to get to the cold drink stands behind the columns, that we both felt it was worthless and, I, for one, just stood up on my triangle of granite, looking over the jostling heads to the darkening sky and first glimpse of stars, with my mind mostly on the marvelous piece just rendered.

We were both regulars, but never seemed to connect in the human avalanches fleeing the exits at the end. That was, until one evening when we found ourselves going home in the same subway car, he in a seat and I hovering on a strap above him. We talked for the first time and decided to meet for a quick supper before the show the very next night. Then we shared adjacent corners of the same base, and did so for the rest of the concert series, and the next and the next and the next, as much for the founder as the music.

Minnie Guggenheimer was a great philanthropist, but an unlikely founder of an organization dedicated to bringing classical music to the public. That she pulled it off so successfully was a credit

to her own vision, determination, and connections. In time she went from being Mrs. Charles S. Guggenheimer, socialite, to just plain old Minnie, beloved idol of the Masses.

Minnie's mother was a friend of Adolph Lewisohn, the Stadium's donor. That's simply how she got the job. Over the ensuing years she not only gave money herself, but badgered every other wealthy prospect into keeping the spirit alive. She organized the first concert series there in 1919. And from the first, she endeared herself to her audiences by simply being herself – a true character.

By the time we got to attending the outdoor concerts, she was already a short, dumpy gray-haired matron who sailed onstage at the close of intermission two nights a week, in what must've been sneakers or some similar rubber soled shoes (so she wouldn't slip on weather-wet surfaces). She always wore cheap cotton house-dresses that looked like they'd never met an iron, and on her head might be, likely as not, a pot hat borrowed from her cook. On one arm was her signature large handbag that flapped in the breeze as she endeavored to extract that evening or later program notes (or sometimes recent recipes she'd tried or merely articles from newspapers) with all kinds of difficulty. With her glasses half down her nose she'd grab hold of the standing mike and shout, 'Hello, everybody!' and the entire audience would shout back in unison, 'Hello Minnie' It was a ritual they all loved.

What then ensued was what she had become famous for – her inevitable bloopers. She was the only person I knew who could outdo Arthur in the *malaprop* department. She made him look like an amateur in comparison. She enticed the *crème de la crème* of the musical world to perform in her 'Open Air Living Room' for her thousands of 'intimate friends'. Then in her haste to assemble their background information, she hardly got any of it straight.

Following are some of her *malapropisms*, a few I remember and the rest gleaned from friends and plagiarized from her daughter Sophie Guggenheimer Untermeyer's biography, 'Mother is Minnie':

Her most famous remark first, repeated in numerous sources –

While walking onto the stage she pulled out of her bag the bio of the performer she was to introduce, Isaac Stern, the world renowned violinist (who was also famous for helping save Carnegie Hall from demolition). The article was too lengthy to read by the time she reached the mike. So she brandished it aloft and said,

simply amazed:

‘Would you believe that Isaac Stern’s ‘WHO’S WHO’ is almost seven inches long?’

Among other facts we learned was that the operetta ‘Pinafore’ was written by Gilbert and SOLOMON.

‘Jan Peerce (the tenor) will sing the role of Aida.’

‘Roger Hamerstein will conduct a number from ‘South Pacific’.

Richard Strauss wrote ‘The Beautiful Blue Danube’

Beethoven wrote Verdi’s ‘Requiem’

She once introduced our minister to Czechoslovakia as being from ‘Junkoslavia’.

She told a contingency of workers from Rheigold Beer, a sponsor, that she always used their product to set her hair.

Minnie apologized for being late one night because she had eaten some sweetbreads that didn’t agree with her and had to take a big dose of CITRATE OF CARBONA.

One evening that we attended, rolling thunder and lightning threatened to disrupt the proceedings. After one earthshaking boom, she cried, ‘What in hell am I going to do about the weather?’ Just then the skies opened up and rain fell in buckets. Thousands of patrons scrambled toward the exits or up under the colonnade. Minnie took to the mike and exhorted everyone to return to their seats. ‘It’ll be over in a few minutes, I promise.’

Lo and behold, the shower suddenly ended and stars began appearing, as if by magic. Minnie, as astonished as anyone, dashed to the mike again and said, ‘Good heavens, I hope you all won’t think I’m some kind of witch!’ Laughing, most returned and the concert resumed. The story went that she called the weather bureau to find out what it was going to be a month hence when she had booked a very special guest artist. The answer: ‘Hey, lady. You wanna know

that you gotta' talk to God.' It didn't faze her a bit.

Minnie had begun the concerts in 1918 and continued almost to her death in 1966, after which her daughter Sophie ran them until the demise of the grandiose Lewisohn Stadium itself in 1973, the victim of the wrecker's ball in the name of progress. Though Minnie was certainly a main draw, she was by no means the only reason to attend the concerts. There were many of us there who were hearing quality classical music for the first time. At 25 cents general admission and a buck fifty for the tables up front, it was cheap and fun entertainment on a hot summer night, as well as educational.

She introduced innumerable burgeoning young talent who rose to stardom later. Among them were Marian Anderson and Beverly Sills, to name only two. Arthur and I were hearing some of our favorite recorded Metropolitan Opera singers live for the first time: Leontyne Price, Robert Merrill, Risë Stevens, Renata Tebaldi, who for an encore sang "I Could Have Danced All Night" from *My Fair Lady*, in a heavy Italian accent that broke up the audience. We saw and heard Van Cliburn play Tchaikovsky on his return in 1958 after winning Grand Prize in the piano competition in Moscow, and the audience was so huge that many were sitting on others' laps. (Minnie pronounced it Tchai-COW-ski, by the way.)

Arthur and I chugged up the killer hill from the subway to the stadium all through the 1950s and '60s. Many years later we could still hear the crowds yell 'We want Minnie! We want Minnie', and then her ubiquitous, 'Hello, everybody!' and their reply in unison, 20,000 strong, 'Hello, Minnie'. It echoed down the city's canyons.

A N.Y. XMAS 2009

Without Minnie's competition, Arthur continued his word fracturing uncontested through the ensuing years. Before we knew it, he was 96 and I was 80 – without even trying. But in early fall of 2009, he developed something called a 'trigger finger'. When he'd unclench his left hand, the third or ring finger stayed bent and had to be painfully straightened up again. It grew progressively more uncomfortable, so he had it operated on (by cutting tendons at the base of the finger).

The operation, at our local hospital, St. Vincent's, on 7th Ave.

was a success and his surgeon advised physical therapy beginning December 15 at the center on University Place and 12th St., an easy eastbound bus ride across Greenwich Village. When Arthur's session was over, he suggested that since it was such a sunny pleasant day, why not walk north on University to 14th St. and have lunch, then go to the other side of 14th and catch a westbound bus back to 7th Avenue and home.

After a leisurely fast food lunch at a Wendy's, we retraced our steps back to the corner of University and 14th, intending to cross when the light changed. But we were swamped by the pedestrian traffic coming in all directions from Union Square, cater-corner across the intersection, where holiday tent shops ringed the periphery offering everything Christmas. It was a veritable stampede without the cowpokes to keep the cattle in line.

Until then I had been very protective of Arthur, staying close by his bandaged hand. But I was pushed off the curb ahead of him and couldn't spot his blue cap when I looked back. Suddenly shouts of 'Old man in the gutter! Call 911!'. I turned back to see if he had escaped that crowd. He was nowhere in sight. It had been only moments. Where was he? Pushing my way in reverse, I saw his blond-grey hair through a gap between two fellows who had him in their arms.

Frantic with concern, I got to them just as they were moving his supine body up onto the curb. His cap was gone and blood gushed from a cut above his eyebrows that must have happened when he fell on his glasses that were smashed on the street. When I reached down, I saw that he was unconscious and blood was streaming out of his newly healed wound. The scar had split open and was filled with dirt. He must have tried to brace himself with that hand as he sank.

Concerned as I was, however, I was simply overwhelmed by the efforts of passersby to help. From the ring of onlookers came a host of well dressed men and women who got down on their knees on the filthy sidewalk to give aid. It was almost as if they had been trained for just such an emergency. The young men who had lifted him onto the curb, then propped him up against a lamp post. The canvas school bags they dropped read New York University. From nowhere stepped a young woman dressed all in black with a white collar, who dropped her shoulder bag and knelt down to care for Arthur's knee that had skin torn from it and was leaking blood out

of his ripped pant leg. She ripped the tear more to let it drain.

She called for someone to run into the nearby restaurant and get handfuls of paper napkins. She slipped off a scarf from her neck to make a tourniquet above the knee. A by-stander was holding a bottle of water. She commandeered that to allow those caring for his other wounds to wet napkins with it and clean surrounding areas. A businessman took a cell phone from his briefcase to call 911.

By then I was kneeling in the gutter holding Arthur's right arm, almost out of my mind with anxiety. Someone next to me handed over Arthur's broken glasses, that were about to be run over by an approaching bus. There were hands reaching in from everywhere to help. Who says New Yorkers are cold self-centered egoists?, I thought. He was still unconscious. His head had been rested back against the lamp post. Sunlight glinted off his mussed blond/ white hair. Except for the blood trickling down one side of his nose, his face looked serene. A young matron with a little boy in tow, set down her shopping bags full of gifts, and knelt to hold his shoulder from slipping. Her child, hair the same color as Arthur's and wanting to be useful, stood beside her patting the top of Arthur's head, ancient and infant caught in the same golden glow. It was a guardian angel moment.

The ambulance with medics on board arrived shortly. A gurney was quickly withdrawn and Arthur lifted onto it. Slowly coming around, he was asked, among other things, if he knew what city he was in. 'New York City'. With that the crowd around us shouted, 'New York! New York! New York! Merry Christmas!' And off the ambulance sped, all flashing lights and wailing sirens. Very N.Y.

(Before the ambulance arrived I was able to obtain the name and address of the girl in black – she worked in an art gallery in Brooklyn. At first reluctant to do so, saying she was just doing what she thought was her duty, she finally relented. A replacement scarf was purchased at Lord & Taylor and sent to her. In a grateful e-mail she wrote that she'd worn it every day since receiving it, she liked it so much. Her name was as lovely as she – Ciara.)

With me riding shotgun, Arthur was whisked to St. Vincent's ER and given an entire roster of tests because of his advanced age, but his main problem was trauma. It was believed he'd tripped out on the street and fainted when he fell. His wounds would heal, given time, but it took several days to be able to stand and walk alone. He

was placed in an eighth floor ‘semi’ and pampered beyond belief by the hardboiled nurses when they learned he was 96. ‘Impossible’ was the usual rejoinder. The room was huge by hospital standards. One entire wall was plate glass with a spectacular view north that took in all mid-town Manhattan. The first two nights Arthur had no roommate so I joined him after his supper. We dimmed the overheads and sat in front of the window watching the slow darkening progression of sky and compensatory increase and brightening of the city’s lights.

The second night we doused all the lights in the room and again sat before the great vista. It was like seeing the world in a huge private panoramic 3-D screening room. The ocular range of interest went from apartment voyeurism close by to tracing garlands of tiny white dots defining distant span bridges, and from coping with the immediacy of the enormous phallic Empire State Building directly ahead to tracking sparks of plane signals approaching and leaving LaGuardia far over on the right. We both began to feel as though we were actually *occupying* that vast space out there along with the glittering spires and ribbons of traffic far below – white beams (advancing) and red (leaving) – all of us together part of some magical pop up Christmas card that we were instantly sending to ourselves at the same time. It was awesome. We watched for hours.

(Note: St. Vincent’s Hospital, a mainstay to all Village residents for a century and a half, announced its closing for good soon. The sad reality occurred the following April. We were among the last to avail ourselves of that spectacular experience.)

When Arthur was considered well enough to stand and walk, he was sent to a rehabilitation center, but not just any rehab. It was called the Village Nursing Home, and it occupied the far side of a narrow triangular park that dated from the early Greenwich Village era and before. It was a local charity we all gave donations to, hoping we’d never have to use it. Originally a rather grand hotel, its main lobby had evolved into a gathering place for all the ‘inmates’ (their term) for special events. Determined he was not going to use the customary wheelchair to go from his cramped 3rd floor share to the pre-holiday celebration, and adamant about leaving the place entirely before Christmas Day, Arthur and I went arm in arm along the hall in front of the nurses’ station, and down in the recalcitrant

elevator to show that he was capable of coping on his own.

The Great Room had been sparsely spruced up with stick-on decals of poinsettias and Santa Claus, and a *faux* tree with one strand of winking lights hid the front of the baby grand. The elegant *belle epoch* windows that went from floor to ceiling looked out on a perfect setting: the little enclosed park across the street, deep in snow that had spilled out through its wrought iron apertures to a poorly cleared sidewalk glazed with ice. Gently falling flakes continued to curtain the windows outside throughout the performance.

Wheelchairs pushed by young staff members were arriving one by one. The occupants varied, from non-compos Alzheimer cases who remained silently distant behind hooded eyes, to cheerful rosy cheeked matrons in Sunday best, beads matching their good pair of earrings, and hair neatly coifed. The handlers had been carefully trained to wear pleasant smiles at all times. Some of the men wore bright holiday ties over shirts open at the throat and generally preferred the folding chairs that had been lined up opposite the wheelers with a wide parquet floor space between left clear for the performers. Early thoughts it was a loony bin was quickly dispelled.

I took a seat up against a column, with Arthur on the other side of me. Beside him a strikingly beautiful woman was wheeled in. She could have been a stand-in for Her Serene Highness Princess Grace (Kelly) of Monaco 50 years earlier. Simply but elegantly attired in a pale blue dress with small diamonds sparkling at her ears and throat, her silver hair had the faintest blue sheen. Arthur struck up a conversation immediately, and, as might be expected in such a place, it was about age. Because revelations of his age usually elicited gasps of disbelief, he grew to assume he was always the most senior member of any gathering – and, truth to tell, he'd grown rather smug about it. I overheard him tell her highness he was very likely, at 96, the oldest one there..

She smiled condescendingly and touched his arm. 'Oh, you'd be wrong, sir. In three months I will be 100. Think of that.', then added with a twinkle ' But I wouldn't mind dating you anyway.'

The start of the proceedings intervened to save him further embarrassment. A tall stoop-shouldered man had been playing the piano during the buildup. Obviously a gifted musician in his time, he kept forgetting passages and going back over them. He was followed by a butterball of a lady wearing a large hat trimmed in holly and berries. Her rather lengthy poem droned on long enough for

audience members to wriggle and whisper. Polite applause.

Then came the star attraction of the afternoon. He bounded in, cute as a button, all smiles, short, slim and lithe. Dressed in a dark suit with a white shirt undone at the collar and an indifferent tie loosened and limp, he was what in early vaudeville days would've been categorized as a 'survivor', meaning he could do almost anything well enough to get gigs to keep going, but never get top billing.

His shtick was impersonating the singing of Frank Sinatra. To aid the illusion, he had brought a CD player and instrumental background arrangements for Sinatra's major hits., that he set up under the piano in such a way that a kick on the top changed songs. He placed a short brimmed fedora at an angle on his head and positioned a partly lit cigarette attached to a wire ring on his middle finger in such a way that it looked like it was between that and his forefinger. He talked with it. and gestured with it, but never took a drag.

In the hour or more that he performed, (and he'd sounded more like Sinatra than one would think from looking at him) he was able to get some of the old-timers tapping on their wheelchair footrests and a few softly mumbling along. Others closed their eyes and swayed heads in dreamy follow-along. But one woman opposite us went wild with rhythm. Tall and angular, with hair pulled back by a bandeau, she thumped so energetically on her footrest that her knee blanket slipped off several times. She knew every song and mouthed the lyrics without actually singing them. Her lips parted to show she'd neglected to put in her dentures, but that didn't bother her. She gummed away with eyes closed, maybe remembering the days when she was a real *chanteuse* in some club. Who knew?

Faux Frank played up to her a lot. It was good for business. All the rest of us were enjoying her as much as him. But when she began flailing her arms in all directions and disrupting the wigs of the ladies around her, a (smiling) attendant went to her, tucked in her blanket and wheeled her out. The entertainer rushed over and bussed her glistening forehead and the applause level rose tremendously. She exited like the Queen of England in her golden coach, waving backhanded to the masses.

Arthur and I slipped out just after her, in order to be first at the one elevator that was working to get upstairs. Otherwise it meant an hour or more in line. The social worker interviewed him next

morning and pronounced him able to cope on his own. He had successfully completed all the required ‘assignments’ in the top floor rehab center. It was an ingeniously built ‘real-life’ apartment actually. Participants had to learn to turn the key in the door, open and close it, switch on lights and utilize all the appliances in the kitchen. Folding napkins was a task (surprisingly difficult for ones with motor disabilities), as was counting silverware and placing it in the correct slots. Arranging clothing in drawers and closets was also a requirement, as was going up and down stairs unaided. And so on.

Arthur had whizzed through all that, and spent the rest of his allotted time up there shooting the breeze with the physical therapists. I arrived at the Village Nursing Home on Christmas eve morning. He eschewed the need for another ambulance ride by having me promise his doctor (Tatiana, a White Russian, and marvelous) that I would hail a cab to get home. But when we got outside, he wanted none of it. We walked. Or rather, slid. The snowplows had missed that part of the Village after the recent storm, and it meant hesitant mincing steps across ice patches to reach dry road. But we made it. Home again.

I was as happy as he. Those nights alone in our apartment, I thought about our remarkable years together – and there had been so many of them – and how miraculous that we never had any devastating rifts during them. Gore Vidal, the writer, was once asked how he and his longtime partner (recently deceased) had stayed together for so long. His curt answer: ‘No sex.’ That may have been a clue for us. Our platonic relationship was such that we considered each other more than brothers – but never lovers. We shared mutual concerns, dedication and affection, maybe in part because Arthur never could stop being Mr Malaprop, nor I stop delighting in him. Every day was a fresh surprise. For my eighty-first birthday he wished me a happy ‘eighty-worst’. Perfect!

On his 97th birthday in March 2010, I asked, now that I was an *octogenarian* and he a long time *nonagenarian*, did he aspire to the Big One and become a *centenarian*?

‘A what?’ he asked, increasingly hard of hearing.

‘CENTEN-É-RIAN,’ I repeated. ‘You know, 100 years old’

‘Oh, you mean CEM-E-TÉRY-AN.’ I never asked again.

Arthur and I learned about it in a rather roundabout way. I had received a disturbing call from our landlord Michael saying he was interested in evicting us from our apartment on Waverly Place, and would be willing to give us \$500 for moving costs. Out of the blue! His reasoning was that he believed we were living in our summer home on Nantucket Island longer than we claimed, and were not in the New York apartment for more than 180 days a year, the legal requirement to be considered a resident.

We learned of a lawyer from other apartment dwellers in the building who had gone through the same experience. He was an affable but very savvy fellow from an Italian background in Brooklyn named Joe Maniero. His main business was dealing with immigrants in his downtown Broadway office, so he 'knew the ropes' regarding landlord and tenant problems. (We were allowed to stay with the stipulation that we could not be harassed again nor threatened with eviction without just cause.)

What we learned from Joe in the process, however, was that, since I was the sole legal tenant, in a rent-controlled apartment in New York City, if anything should happen that I had to move out, or die, Arthur could, and probably would, be evicted immediately. How that law came about was when John Lindsay, the handsome current mayor in the early 1960s, decided that Greenwich Village was becoming too gentrified and he wanted the artists, writers and musicians to be returned to inhabit it and make the area colorful again. As an artist, I had to go down to City Hall and fill out applications and take with me examples of my work and a business card as proof of my profession. I then got a permit that I could present to any landlord for acceptance in a Village building. (Before Michael there were at least 4 previous owners dating back to 1961, but the law continued to be in effect in 1998.)

Joe advised that we go down to City Hall with passports or auto licenses and take the elevator to the second floor and the Office of The City Clerk to get registered as 'Domestic Partners'. He told us it was the only way to protect Arthur in an emergency. We had never considered anything like official 'marriage' of any sort before, even though we were aware of rumblings in the hustings, and worried it might become a stigma of sorts.

What convinced us was that the Partnership applied only to the City of New York – not the state or beyond. On a brisk day in late

What we learned from Joe in the process, however, was that, since I was the sole legal tenant, in a rent-controlled apartment in New York City, if anything should happen that I had to move out, or die, Arthur could, and probably would, be evicted immediately. How that law came about was when John Lindsay, the handsome current mayor in the early 1960s, decided that Greenwich Village was becoming too gentrified and he wanted the artists, writers and musicians to be returned to inhabit it and make the area colorful again. As an artist, I had to go down to City Hall and fill out applications and take with me examples of my work and a business card as proof of my profession. I then got a permit that I could present to any landlord for acceptance in a Village building. (Before Michael there were at least 4 previous owners dating back to 1961, but the law continued to be in effect in 1998.)

Joe advised that we go down to City Hall with passports or auto licenses and take the elevator to the second floor and the Office of The City Clerk to get registered as 'Domestic Partners'. He told us it was the only way to protect Arthur in an emergency. We had never considered anything like official 'marriage' of any sort before, even though we were aware of rumblings in the hustings, and worried it might become a stigma of sorts.

What convinced us was that the Partnership applied only to the City of New York – not the state or beyond. On a brisk day in late October, we bundled up and hiked down to the Municipal Building at 1 Centre Street that hovered above City Hall. Lunch hour being over, the usual noontime crowd had dispersed. We had easy access past the guards at the Entry, and wandered around the over reaching arches that rose 3 stories above a central plaza screened by immense Corinthian columns. Early on the plaza was used as a thruway for auto traffic, but by our time it had reverted to a pedestrian park. It was easy to see why it was considered the highest and grandest government office built to date. So impressed by it was Josef Stalin that he had the main building of Moscow University modeled after it.

For all its outer grandeur, including a central tower with a 20 foot gilded statue atop it that dominated all lower Manhattan, its interior was a dismal disappointment. Cramped colorless elevators led to equally depressing upper floor lobbies. Directions to the City Clerk's office were clearly indicated along a long hallway with strip lighting overhead and doorways leading off to each side to

rooms where wedding ceremonies could be performed. As we passed, a Puerto Rican nuptial was in progress on the left with seemingly hoards of little niños noisily running about in colorful chaos. We only hoped they didn't belong to the bride who was arrayed in virginal white – layers upon layers of it, that almost engulfed the short bridegroom beside her. Around the dun colored walls sat a Gilbert and Sullivan assortment of 'their sisters and their cousins who are reckoned by the dozens, and their aunts', all satiny bosoms with faces made up like George Washington. Aside from the beleaguered bride-bridegroom, there were no men in sight.

Further along the corridor, a quiet, almost sullen ceremony was underway. A sad unkempt looking couple in worn clothing stood before a female justice of the peace whose visage was anything but friendly. The bride's jeans were unbuttoned at the top to reveal a prominent protrusion of belly. The groom, with matted hair longer than hers stared away at the wall. The message? – Just get it over.

The hall stopped abruptly at a small sunlit room painted yellow that had a row of folding chairs on the far wall. To the right was a chest-high counter across the width, behind which was the office of the City Clerk under a high municipal window. Obscuring the clerk at the moment was a pair of very large, very obese women of color who were leaning over the counter, both dressed in pants and men's shirts hanging out. Both sported wide fat wristwatches. They were arguing in Harlem patois over which of them was the head of the house.

We took seats on the end, and could see the clerk through a slit beside them. She was small, white, thin, with nervous blonde hair piled hurriedly on top of her head. Her face had the resigned look of someone who had seen it all as she shuffled documents with fingers that were tipped blood red. The gum she was chewing must have been from yesterday, since she didn't seem to be getting any pleasure out of it. On closer inspection, she didn't look as young as she thought she did, or maybe it was that frustrating time of day.

She took the pad on which she had scribbled their information to a desk under the window and disappeared from sight as she sat and typed. The keys clicked impatiently and loud. When finished she returned with a finished document that she handed to one of them as she said, 'That's it, ladies' and collected their fee.

Somewhat disconcerted, the woman asked, 'Do we kiss now ?' 'Whatever,' was her response as the clerk waved them aside and, without missing a beat of chewing her gum, beckoned to the next party.

An elderly man in a suit and a young man in jeans and a sweater approached the counter. They stood a foot or two apart and looked directly ahead, not speaking to each other. Asked if they were related by blood, the elder said 'No', the younger shook his head. Were they domestic partners? The younger shook his head. No, the elder said 'Yes'. How long? The elder said, 'Two years', the younger shifted his feet nervously, but kept still. That went on for the rest of the questioning with the elder doing most of the talking.

Arthur and I looked at each other and raised eyebrows, trading 'ahems', under our breath, mutual indicators to each other that the situation seemed a bit fishy. At those moments all sorts of possibilities ran through the mind, especially when the older man paid all the expenses and the younger showed scant attention. Their certificate was duly typed out and handed over, and they left without having said a word to each other.

Our certification also went without a hitch, after which we shook hands and I pocketed the document. We were hitched on paper, if only in New York City. In the elevator lobby our predecessors were still waiting to go down, and as we all chatted, the truth of their applying for

partnership was revealed: The elder wanted to live in the south of France for 2 years, but didn't want to relinquish his rent stabilized apartment; he advertised at Columbia University for a student with two years left, to live in and caretake the place rent free. He admitted that in front of the Clerk he couldn't remember the boy's name, nor the boy his. They had only met and made the arrangement two days earlier. Our fertile minds had conjured up much more lurid possibilities.

That reminded me of the wonderful French movie made in 1961 called 'The Seven Deadly Sins'. In black and white, the seven episodes were filmed by as many different directors, including Eugene Ionesco and Jean-Luc Goddard. Each depicted the capital sins in unusual and provocative scenarios, introduced by a Master of Ceremonies who, after each segment, winkingly beckoned the

viewer to follow him to the next – all down dark Parisian streets to music of the ocarina.

As my faulty memory had it, after the seventh, the M.C. indicated, ahah, that was not the end of the movie, and invited us (and the camera) with a bend of his finger to trail him once more, along a darker, slummier street. We came upon 2 obvious drag queens sashaying arm in arm ahead of us in outrageous get-up and hats; a pencil-thin slinky fellow in black tails and stovepipe hat; a priest in clerical collar holding the hand of a little girl in Shirley Temple curls and kewpie doll skirt; a surly crook in pulled down cap and knickers; a femme fatale in tight slinky gown with deep cleavage and shaved head; and last but not least, a taxi stopped up ahead, out of which stepped a corpulent cardinal in biretta and cape, who reached back in and helped out a sailor in French beret and tight thighs, and they walked hand in hand towards a distant closed door with light seeping out around its edges.

At the door, the M.C. invited us to follow all those characters down a narrow staircase to a brightly lit cellar room. By the time we (and the camera) reached the bottom, they were all in place on pedestals and being photographed by a camera club. After a slow pan around the studio amid flashbulbs bursting and cameras clicking, and after we had come to the realization that we were in the company of artists and models, the M.C. motioned us toward him as he made for the exit, saying, before he vanished, ‘Ahah, you see? The eighth deadly sin is – your mind.’

(My illusory cast may differ from the original, but I trust the reader got the gist.)

CHANGE OF LIFE: A Triptych

1.

Sarah Lutke (Lut-key) was ‘Sally’ to her old Radcliffe College chums (at least the only one I ever met), ‘My Darlink’ to the Dutch *emigré* who was her husband, and ‘Madame L’ to the rest of us for her haughty demeanor and disdain for almost all creatures great and small, especially the human variety.

Brought up in a privileged household along with her lesbian sister, who became a doctor, her father gave each girl one million dollars on her 21st birthday. And that was only for starters.

Madame L was also headstrong and determined to get whatever she wanted in life, no matter what or how.

She met her husband-to-be, Karl Lutke, while shopping one day in Macy's department store. He was a floor walker and assistant buyer in the chinaware department, and she was attracted immediately to his 6 foot 5 blond appearance and heavy accent. He would be the perfect candidate for a makeover into the Episcopal priest she envisioned as a lifetime companion on whose arm she could be seen at all the most prestigious religious functions in which she intended to have a great presence in the future.

Father (as he was always thereafter referred to, even by her) dutifully graduated from seminary and took up his role as her liturgical-collared adjutant. Together they would be invincible – and secretly reviled by much of the New York dioceses. She attempted to dominate every church board she joined or funded. But as time went on she tired of the backbiting and bitterness (and lack of appreciation rendered) and decided that missionary work was to be her next vocation.

She had Father installed as the rector of a particularly rundown Harlem church, whose members welcomed the couple with open arms and collection plates. It took some time for the congregation to get accustomed to Father's accent (when he gave the call for all to bow their heads, he'd say 'Leddus pry'), but generally it was an oil and vinegar relationship that blended nicely. Madame L got to wear some of her very special pieces of jewelry – she had a canary yellow diamond ring that would knock your eye out – and it gave her a reason to fly once a year to Paris for a suit fitting at Chanel's, where she had a reserved form. (She hated Paris and only stayed long enough to choose fabrics and style, and have dinner brought up to their suite at the Ritz. They hadn't been inside the Louvre for years.) She claimed 'her' parishioners wanted her to set a good example by looking her best at all times. And her best was *the* best.

The couple bought the town house across from our building in 1978, just after the anthropologist Margaret Mead, who had lived there for years with a companion, died. The Lutkes were both post-middle aged, but strikingly well preserved. Madame L was of medium height but remembered taller because of her demeanor. Her hair had been carefully kept a light shade of auburn, combed in soft waves on both sides of her head and knotted in back. Her face was porcelain white. The only

makeup she applied was to her lips which, when opened, revealed astonishingly bad teeth. They were literally greenish brown. (She hated going to a dentist and must have decided to let them rot first. She succeeded admirably.)

As for Father, he had aged into a white-haired giant – big head, large hands, slim and erect in ubiquitous black. And accustomed to being noticed. It was said he was a terrific dance partner. He was also very correct, with no sense of humor at all. And as they aged there was less and less to be humorous about. Madame L had been a heavy drinker since college and could hold her liquor in such a way that one hardly noticed until she collapsed. Father was spending more and more time at her mercy. Her favorite drink of the moment was a ‘bullshot’ (vodka mixed with beef broth), and she admitted that when ordering her third or fourth, she had to be careful to pronounce it carefully. She would go to a restaurant and order one after another, and never bother to eat her meal. He would guide her carefully to their car with one arm firmly gripping her elbow.

Their car was as special as they. She wouldn’t dream of owning a Rolls or a Lincoln. Too *ordinaire*. But she got word that a bishop she knew had ordered a custom built Checker (yes, the same company that made Checker Cabs) and didn’t like its deep shade of purple. She loved purple and bought it. Arthur and I rode in the back seat once through insane Manhattan traffic, with Father driving so fast and with such little regard for any other vehicle, that he might as well have been speeding on a German Autobahn. He was a terror behind the wheel. Our legs were straight out in front of us to brace ourselves if he stopped short, but we found that our feet didn’t even reach the back of the front seats. The car was *huge*, and all slippery-slidey eggplant leather inside.

The Madame could be generous to those who stuck around long enough to be deemed friends. We made the cut soon after our first meeting and qualified. In an era (late 1970s-80s) when men were beginning to sprout bunny tail sideburns and wear shirt fronts unbuttoned to mid-chest with chunky necklaces dangling to the waist, she very kindly presented me with a long Florentine silver chain with city façade charms dangling from it that had been a gift her mother bought on one of her yearly European tours. The fact that the Madame hated it didn’t detract from the thoughtfulness of the thoughtfulness of the presentation. Consistency was never one

of her traits: one Christmas she gave me a quart jar of beef fat she had been rendering all year. I supposed it was from all the beef she'd cooked to get the broth for her bullshots.

Every Easter Sunday after mass, Father and she picked us up in the Purple Bomber and took us to brunch at the St. Regis Hotel. It was very special for us. But for Father it was just another aggravation in a continual series of them. He complained incessantly about the wait staff, and threw his weight around about food for Madame not done properly. His collar was his badge. By that time she'd be two out of three sheets to the wind and could care less what was put in front of her if it didn't tinkle with ice.

Inevitably time caught up with her and she had to be assisted everywhere. She was in hospital as much as out, sometimes, I thought, to dry out. We visited her when we could. The last time was at St. Luke's, a hospital far up on the West Side near the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, an area she knew by heart. Propped up against pillows she looked frail and diminished. But her eyes lit up when she said she had something very interesting to tell us. We bent forward to listen.

It seemed that three days before, in the middle of the night, she was awakened by a commotion outside her private room. There was much scraping of furniture and carrying of boxes from the closet just beyond her door that had been a storage place for vases and flower pots. She rang for her night nurse to tell her what was going on. The nurse was part of the commotion and told her she'd be back after things got settled.

When she returned some time later, she told Madame L that a person in women's clothing was admitted to the ER after having been found unconscious in the street, badly beaten and probably violated. They placed her in the women's ward for further observation of possible internal injuries. But when they removed her blood-stained dress and undergarments, to everyone's surprise, she turned out to be a he. Then on even closer examination found her to be a she *and* a he. Or, as far as could be determined immediately, a male in the process of becoming a female.

'She' had gone through the process of castration and had been on female hormone therapy for some time, as evident by substantial breast enhancement, the nurse disclosed. But more than that would have to wait for closer examination. The immediate problem was where to *place* the patient. There were strict hospital

rules against mixing sexes in wards or semi's. The head nurse was in a quandary. A quick consultation with other night staff resulted in the idea of cleaning out the ample closet and placing a folding cot in there for the time being. It turned out to be a permanent arrangement.

Madame L kept up with the events from her daytime candy stripper. The patient had long hair, was dressed in a mini skirt and blouse and wore high heels. 'She' carried an oversize bag. Word was that 'she' was likely a hooker who hooked onto the wrong John and got beaten up by him or her pimp. Madame kept her door open all the next day to follow the comings and goings. By nightfall she was exhausted and fell asleep early.

When she awoke it was well after midnight and she had missed supper. She was about to press her buzzer for something to eat when she saw a figure leaning against the wall beside the closet door wrapped in a long hospital robe. It was the she/he. She decided to end all confusion by calling it a 'she' and gestured for the person to come into her room.

The new patient had trouble walking, but slowly made her way to Madame's bedside. Her hair was a brighter shade of Madame's own. Pale and thin, she hugged herself in pain. Madame invited her to draw up a chair, which she did. Her eyes were blackened and face swollen on one side, but she was not old, maybe in late twenties. She said in a soft baritone that she was hungry. Madame buzzed for attention, and when sandwiches were brought in, and the deliverer left, she asked the patient if she wanted a little drink. She explained that she had a small stash of vodka under the bed that she'd bribed a cleaning lady to smuggle in. Even Father wasn't aware of it. Delighted, the patient rose, closed the door and returned so they could share a private snort. The little snort became a lengthy one. Madame told us that she couldn't remember having had a more fascinating experience before. They bonded immediately, and told each other things about themselves they hadn't divulged to anyone. I would be the last to betray their trust, except to say that, according to Madame, the younger patient treated her bedside as if it were a confessional, and she never felt so wanted – or needed, before. According to the source, the two got delightfully high and giggly. Madame said she hadn't had such fun since sorority house days at Radcliffe. Her guest forgot all newly learned feminine etiquette and slung a still hairy leg up over

the chair arm. Madame did reveal, and it could be repeated, that when the guest finally got up to head back to the cot-in-a-closet, she reached over to her night-stand for a crystal vial of perfume she never traveled without, even to hospital. The scent had been created for her by Lanvin of Paris. (I knew it well, because each time we were out together I'd catch a small whiff of it as she passed. It smelled like spring.) She presented it to the patient, saying, 'Take this for your new change of life, my dear.' They hugged and that was that.

Madame told us the entire story several days later. One thing led to another and we began discussing the Christine Jorgensen saga. Christine (nee George), was the first celebrity sex change in America to gain worldwide notoriety in 1952. The details were identical to Madame's guest, except that subsequent operations took place in regular succession with Christine. Madame's guest could only have one done when enough money was available, then another. Hence the streetwalking that fateful evening.

Madame L was growing tired, so we ended by saying we sailed on the same ship as Jorgensen in 1954 (Queen Elizabeth) eastbound from England where she was photographing the Elizabeth II coronation. We were in 3rd Class, she in 2nd. The night she appeared in 3rd for a farewell dance, guest of the captain, we watched amazed as the whole crew of the ship, all spiffed up and slicked back, stood on queue to dance with her. It took hours.

Madame's eyes were closing, so I helped tuck her in for a long nap. She turned her head away as I pulled the sheet up over her shoulder, and we thought she was already asleep. But as we got to the door, a muffled voice came from the pillow: " For god's sake, don't tell Father any of this. He simply wouldn't understand.'

2

Tennessee Williams was the one who suggested, at a cocktail party on Beekman Place in Manhattan in the late 1950s, that I 'go west, young man – Key West.' I was experiencing painful sinus problems in winters in New York and took him up on it, thinking the sun and air would be beneficial. They weren't, but I continued to winter there well into the new century. I loved the place, even though I saw him there, maybe 5 times in all, singularly plastered.

Key West in those days was like the outback for artists, writers

and pubescent hippies. Nobody had any money. Everyone scrounged. Boozing was like breathing. Sex wasn't much of an issue since it was mostly too hot to get hot, though everybody worked at it. Daylight was excoriating, the nights liquid. I never saw any place where the stars shone more brightly or the sky was more densely black.

There were sailor bars the length of Duval Street, with great muscled lesbian bouncers called 'diesel dikes' who could handle recalcitrant seamen better than any MPs, intermingled with a number of other watering holes, literally for every persuasion. The Navy was reducing its footprint on the Key, but Harry Truman still spent vacations there. (Funnily enough, there was an establishment on the corner of Margaret Street and the main drag Truman Avenue called the Margaret Truman Laundry that was there for years before the Trumans arrived, but tourists insisted on having their pictures taken in front of it, probably assuming the president's daughter was inside washing and folding.)

The burgeoning hippie faction clustered in Mallory Square at the northwestern rim of the Key where later great cruise ships would dock long enough to let their minions shop 'til they dropped in the T-shirt emporia and souvenir stands that began encroaching, and eventually choking the bar scene on Duval. The hippie contingency lived and shot up in rundown vans, pup tents or in sleeping bags in the big open parking lot beside the quay. It would take only a modicum of imagination to conjure what that scene was like: the smells of pot, urine and camp cooking, multiplied a hundred times, were heady beyond belief.

The more innovative of the hippie population, along with guitar plunking and whiny folk singing, took to tie-dying and hand-painting, and hung the results on clotheslines strung between the vans to sell to visitors. That was the beginning of what became 'The Sunset Sideshow'. For many years people had been flocking to the Square to watch the sun go down over the Gulf of Mexico, and by tradition to applaud and raise glasses or cans to celebrate the phenomenon as the last of it sank into the briny.

In the early 1960s the nightly event was fairly primitive and *ad hoc*, with Dylan clones and juvenile Mamas and Papas entertaining each other for fun. In every succeeding year that I ventured there, it became slicker and more commercial, until, by the turn of the century it was a mini carnival, with high wire cat walking acts, sword

swallowers, fire eaters, living statues and con artists mixed in with the tie-dyes, beaded jewelry and the perennial matron on her bicycle peddling homemade brownies through the crowd. The parking lot had eventually been tarred over and white lined and the car owner had to take a stamped ticket from a machine to enter.

I used to wander the downtown streets until late soaking up ideas for sketches that I would return next day and complete in detail, then take them back to my \$50 a week motel room to color. Some days I 'd bike out to past the turtle kraals and draw fishermen unloading shrimp catches. Others I spent exploring the deep pine groves at the Key's eastern end, with their exotic tropical flora and fauna and bird life that made me realize why Audubon was so attracted to it during his short stay. Occasionally on an off day I donned a swimsuit and hunted through the ancient dump pile along the southern shore, gleaning some beautifully oxidized glass shards and 19th century crockery. Once I found a four sided deep green Hollander gin bottle in good condition with a neck as patina-ed as a peacock's. I took it to an antique dealer who gave me \$100 for it.

I quite often strolled in cooler late afternoons along the tree-canopied sidewalks of Simonton Street, way up past the corner stone church and the old Post Office building to a quieter neighborhood. I paused one time at a partly rundown former motel, 10 units or so in a row right along the sidewalk, set up on a narrow roofed porch that spanned the full length. One or two of the upright posts were missing, as were some of the fancy cut-out wooden corner brackets so famous in the Keys, but the building had apparently been converted into single room occupancy. Interested in capturing some details, I was about to squat across the street and take out my sketchbook when a voice called out from one of the middle units, 'Hey. How ya doin'?'

Leaning back in a rocker was a man, possibly in his early 30s, in a tee shirt and wash pants with feet resting on the rail 'Why you wanna paint this old wreck? It's nothin' to look at.' I explained why while sitting on the curb and beginning to sketch. He said no more until I finished. After packing up my gear to leave, I gave him a friendly 'see ya' wave and started off.

He countered with 'You wanna beer?' I said sure and crossed over to his porch. He brought out a cold one for each of us and resumed rocking. I sat cross-legged on the floor in front of him. There was an awkward pause as we sipped and quietly sized each other up.

Quick assessment: he was pleasant looking, but not memorable, with rather delicate features and jet black hair pulled back into a ponytail. His bare arms were smooth and white, as were his ankles below rolled-up cuffs. Large dark eyes and small hands – he was probably about 5 foot 7 or so, with a winning smile. Spanish-Latino descent most likely, but he spoke English with no accent.

After the usual intros, I asked what he did .and as he spoke a story unfolded that was so preposterous and seemingly implausible that the reader should be reminded that the author went to lengths afterwards to successfully verify it. Tonio (Antonio) was the young man's name. He was from Havana and missed the wife and little daughter he had to leave behind. But economic hardships and the 1959 rebel Fidel Castro's takeover of Cuba gave him no choice but fleeing to avoid possible incarceration in a concentration camp – a fate inflicted on many thousands of gay men. Gay? Yes. But was he gay? No, but he made his living cross-dressing as a woman. An entertainer? No, as an escort, the circumstances of which would have been impossible for Castro, Che Guevara or Camilo Cienfuegos, the *muy macho* leaders of the revolution, to condone. It had been difficult enough to hide them during the reign of previous dictator Batista and his equally brutal henchmen, all of whom had fled into exile on January 1st of that year.

Tonio was desperate for work to take care of his small family. He'd done some dressing up in drag for school productions, and photographs of him had circulated around his neighborhood. A local politician, who was a sworn enemy of Batista and knew he had been fingered by the regime for a wipeout, had a new (second) young wife who refused to appear in public with him for fear of her safety. Seeing the photos of Tonio in his secretary's school yearbook, he came up with the idea of replacing her with him, who somewhat resembled her, at long -view public functions. The wife agreed and it was tried a few times. As long as Tonio wasn't allowed to interact, especially with the press, and stayed in the background, or better still, in the limo and was seen only through a window, it worked fine. Think Perons, Argentina.

It was a double-edged sword of a job for Tonio, however. He liked the challenge of pretending to be someone else and getting away with it, and being paid very well for very little work. Even his wife thought it was weird but acceptable. At that point. in real need, money was money. But the sinister side was that he could be

gunned down along with his boss at any moment.

The outcome was that, in the ensuing turmoil, the politician was shot and killed. Tonio wasn't present at the time, but his fate was in jeopardy. His hired make-up man and dresser (who *was* gay) arranged to get him on a boat that was leaving in a few days for Key West with the first load of refugees. He also gave him contacts in the Keys to look up.

The rest of the story proved, if anything, more implausible. One of those contacts was in Key West and doing highly unusual and secretive work for the U.S. Navy. It had nothing to do with bombs or enemy surveillance. It was about the Navy compound right there. In fact it involved the Officers' Club. The bar had been a social center for commissioned personnel since it was first built. Also, by tradition, was the employment of outside women as 'hostesses', mainly from agencies in Miami, to act as companions to the men while in the club itself. Strict rules that prohibited lewd behavior by both parties, or acts of sex, or leaving the premises in pairs had actually relaxed to the point where a few of the parties were living off base together and several pregnancy and child support cases had reared their ugly heads in court.

The hostesses were also finding that, with the rigid restrictions it was difficult to earn enough money to make the long trip down worth their while, even with free room and board for the duration of their deployment. It finally got to the point where new crops of women showed up every few days, and often left before their contracts were up. The situation became critical. What to do?

Enter Tonio's contact. He proposed to the commandant that the solution might be transvestites over transient tramps. There were any number of discreet possibilities right there in Key West. The idea was preposterous, he was told, but it would be considered. Interviews were eventually held, very *sub rosa*, and Tonio was the first one chosen. His experience in Havana was a great asset, but he'd never worked an officer's club before, and agreed to help formulate the new rules of etiquette. His first rule was that the new employees had to be so good that they would fool even the men at the bar. No officer was to know what or who the new 'girls' really were. There would be no lingering with one customer all evening. They had to work the house. Cocktail length dresses were *de rigueur*, cleavages were fine if they had them. Underpants were a must, but had to be worn over custom made latex 'devices', a little

larger than bikinis, ample enough to hold penises folded back toward the rectum, with a built in vagina in front. 'Feelies' were okay, one finger at a time, but no deep probing. When officers got too frisky, it was time to go to the (specially allocated) ladies room. All hostesses had to check out at the employees' door alone.

I told Tonio that I simply didn't believe him. I'd never heard of such a thing. He lifted his legs off the rail and stood up, kicking off his topsiders. 'Look down,' he demanded. His toenails were manicured and polished a lovely shade of deep pink. 'I unglue the fingernails every night and put 'em on again just before I go to work at 9. Come 'ere, I'll show you my costumes.' He led the way into the dark cluttered interior. It was just one room with a sink and small fridge under it at the far end, next to the bathroom. He caught me staring about and added, 'The Navy owns this place. The whole motel. My unit is free, for as long as I work for them.'

He indicated a side wall. Its entire length was one long metal clothes rack hung with colorful outfits. Some glittered in the gloom as his hand ran over them. I was very impressed with how stylish they were. 'Nothing but the best. I choose them.' The opposite wall had shoe boxes piled on top of one another. He took out a slung back pair and stepped into them to show their fit. I was dumb-founded.

I asked if he ever communicated with his wife, and he said every couple days. All the money he made 'hosting' was sent to her for the future. 'I won't be doin' this forever. And you won't believe it, but I've never been with a man, either – ever!'

My final question, as I thanked him for the tour and closed the screen door behind me, was what did he call himself at work? 'Antonia, for my little girl.'

'My Antonia', I thought on the way home, and wondered if Willa Cather was turning in her grave.

3

Transgendered. Transvestite. Transsexual. Those three terms have puzzled more than one individual who has come in contact with any or all of the above, as I have, living in a great metropolis like New York City and being involved with theater and all its inherent ambiguities. To understand the differences, it is necessary first to understand the difference between gender and sex.

One's 'sex' is defined by having a penis or a vagina; one's 'gender identity' is having a sense of oneself, which in most people corresponds to their 'sex'. With 'gender variable' beings, however their bodies may be one sex while they feel like, or are most comfortable with the gender normally associated with the opposite sex. (*Hermaphrodites, of course, are endowed with both sexes, and the current term used for them, 'Intersexed' was devised to soften the 'freakishness' historically associated with the condition. Since I have never knowingly encountered any, I have no stories to tell.*)

Transsexuals, the most anatomically involved, undergo medical procedures along with hormone replacement therapy, genital surgeries and, in the case of males-to-females, breast augmentation (or reduction for females-to-males). The best example here would be that of Christine Jorgenson (born George) and the patient involved with Madame Sarah described in Part 1 of this triptych.

Transgenderists are people who live full-time in the gender roles most comfortable for them. Transvestites usually wear clothes of the opposite sex for kicks and special occasions in which they can be noticed, or as sexual come-ons. All the terms, however, are now lumped under one kinder heading , Crossdressing.

Most crossdressers are gay, but a surprising number are not. In fact it is not that unusual for a husband to don his wife's clothing with her express approval, simply for the fun of it; some crossdress for certain types of work (as in the case of Tonio in part 2). Most of the many jokes abounding are about variants of these situations.

Like:

Two guys are changing in the locker room of a gym, and one notices that the other is wearing a bra and panties.

'Hey, Joe, how long you been wearing women's underwear?'

'Ever since my wife found them in the glove compartment.'

Unlike the previous outdated designations, the term 'crossdressing' doesn't imply any motive other than wanting to dress in the clothing of the opposite sex and affect certain manners of speech and gestures thereof, if only for a short time – as with actors in plays. Nothing psychological is implied. However some people who crossdress, other than actors, often overdo it to present its more ridiculous aspects and for shock value. That becomes 'camp' or 'high camp', just like its attendant mock-arrogant campy

humor:

A gentleman of a certain age and flair purchased a grandfather clock and asked that it be delivered that day. The antiques dealer said the only way he could have it that day was to strap it to his back and walk it home. Which he did. But as he turned the avenue to a side street, he ran smack into another man of a certain age and flair walking his poodle. The clock smashed on the sidewalk and the buyer wept, 'How could you?. How could you?' The dog walker straightened his jacket and replied huffily, ' Well, if you weren't such an elegant old queen, you'd wear a wristwatch like the rest of us!'

One of the best and most beloved campy street personalities of the 1960s and 70s was a young man who called himself Rollerina. No one to the date of this writing ever knew his real name, even though he was still active and still outrageously accoutered. In the spring of 2010 I encountered him in front of Julius's, a famous bar at the end of my Greenwich Village block. Less flamboyant than in former times, he was still on roller skates making the rounds of his most favorite Village haunts and insisting on anonymity, although some denizens said he was a Wall Street broker by day and roamed the Village streets at night and on weekends. In those early days he dressed in a ratty white wedding dress (shades of Dicken's Miss Havisham), with a World War I gas mask in a khaki pack strapped to his back. A loose-haired granny wig was on his head under a prim little black hat with a stiff veil perched straight on top. He wore purple tights under the dress and lace gloves with the fingers cut off. In one of those gloved hands waved a wand (actually an old circus baton) with a glittery star at the peak, that he used to tap the heads of unsuspecting tourists and coo, 'Disappear, disappear.'

Before the crowds that gathered around could get out of hand, he'd speed off on his high-laced roller skates to another part of the city, waving to all and adjusting his '40s wing-tipped eyeglasses. He later became a regular fixture at discos like Studio 54, and was immortalized as the Fairy Godmother of Drag Performers of the era. No longer young at our later chat at Julius's (nor in need of a

a granny wig in *any* condition), he still had the flounce and flare of yesteryear, and roused laughter with his withering putdowns. He suddenly bade us disappear with a tap of the wand and flitted off to butterfly land cooing, ‘Drag queens are never beauties, my sweet – and Vy-sah. Ver-sah.’

*Why does a crossdresser cross the road?
To see how the other side felt.*

Meeting Rollerina that afternoon outside Julius’s in 2010 brought back memories of a much earlier time and place – Key West, Florida, again, in 1993. Cruise ship lines were just beginning to dip their toes – metaphorically – into all-gay ocean crossings and a number of them decided Key West was a natural choice for two-day stopovers. They were right, and right on the money.

A group of aging gay ‘tarts’ (the middle line of the first ‘f’ obliterated) got together over cocktails at La-Ti-Da one Sunday and at brunch decided it would be great fun to rent one of the Old Town Trolleys that usually squired tourists around, then get all gussied up in their seldom – and slightly – worn drag outfits and ride out to the end of the town pier to greet the first shipload. They spent weeks in a frenzy of ironing, re-hemming and. re-blocking.

Gathered in all their tulle on the trolley they resembled over-the-hill kewpie dolls usually found on dowels and sold at carnivals. They were a couple dozen versions of Scarlet O’Hara, each with a picture hat wider than the next, and girth to match. The trolley had been ‘gayly’ festooned with bunting and lofty balloons, and as it made its way along the pier, the driver rang the bring-bring-bring bell to announce their arrival.

Key West was at its best when the sun shone, but at its worst in any form of inclemency. That particular morning a raging storm out at sea was heaving whopping waves at the docks and spilling out across the landings. Arthur and I had bicycled out to the spot after reading about the arrival in the local paper. The winds were so strong, we had all we could do to stand erect gripping our handlebars for balance. Also there was no ship in sight. Word was that it had had to drop anchor well away from land, in a fog bank. Its passenger tenders were having trouble stabilizing in the rough water and it was decided to hold off for several hours.

The Scarlets were understandably upset. Ambulatory ones kick-

ed off their high heels and slipped into flat shoes and high-tailed it to the nearest bar at the head of the wharf, leaving their pastel floppy hats to wilt on the trolley. The others stretched out across the seats and napped or lolled, cursing under their breath. One reached into a large carryall and redid face and eyebrows. Why? For whatever.

We left soon after, realizing the tenders were not going to make it to shore that morning. (In fact they didn't make it at all. The captain of the ship decided to sail on to the next port.) The bar flies returned and they all sat commiserating with one another and popping balloons with their long hat pins. I understood one of them brought back a pint or two from the bar and they all indulged for grievance sake. I saw the driver the next day and asked what happened to them. He said he drove them all home – some were lame and one had a wheelchair – and when questioned about what they did after that, he surmised they probably all took naps. It had been such an exhausting morning and dashed hopes had been so high. They had been robbed of one, perhaps the last, moment of glamour and being in the flow. And they looked so pretty.

A zonked out crossdresser went into a church and knelt in a pew. Just then an acolyte approached down the aisle, attired in a robe and white lace-trimmed surplice, swinging a smoking incense censer on a chain. The crossdresser whispered as the boy passed, 'Love your dress, hon, but you should know your purse is on fire.'

Arthur and I usually went every year to get our free fall flu shots at the hospital nearby, if it had enough serum to go around. When it didn't, we had to travel to other parts of the city, sometimes offices in commercial buildings, sometimes municipal headquarters, once at a federal center that also gave shots for travel abroad and dealt with immigration matters. At the latter, we were forced to join a long line of seniors that trailed around the exterior of the building and down a side street in a late October that was one of the coldest in New York history. The winds were so strong that everybody hunched away in the same position with our backs to the blasts, like seagulls on floating jetsam. Some found scant relief huddled down the steps of a nearby subway station. Others gave up entirely, deeming flu was the lesser evil.

But the flu shot experience to trump all others occurred in the fall of 2009. It took place at an out of the way newly erected edifice hidden away at an angle behind a very old 3-story Village landmark house, that itself fronted at an angle on the intersection of 13th Street and 8th Avenue. Across the avenue was a gem of a little park with a 3-tiered splashing fountain, carefully tended flowering bushes along brick paths, and a recumbent bum on every bench.

The slab-smooth interloper cast an enormous afternoon shadow across the street, and was the highest structure around, broadcasting its intense impudence with plate glass walls and knife-edge corners. Heavy glass doors led onto a foyer so long and dark, it was difficult to see that there was a human figure behind a reception desk at its end. The young woman looked up from an open Vogue and directed us to the bank of elevators to her right, indicating that they were new and only the last one was actually in perfect working order..

But the flu shot experience to trump all others occurred in the fall of 2009. It took place at an out of the way newly erected edifice hidden away at an angle behind a very old 3-story Village landmark house, that itself fronted at an angle on the intersection of 13th Street and 8th Avenue. Across the avenue was a gem of a little park with a 3-tiered splashing fountain, carefully tended flowering bushes along brick paths, and a recumbent bum on every bench.

The slab-smooth interloper cast an enormous afternoon shadow across the street, and was the highest structure around, broadcasting its intense impudence with plate glass walls and knife-edge corners. Heavy glass doors led onto a foyer so long and dark, it was difficult to see that there was a human figure behind a reception desk at its end. The young woman looked up from an open Vogue and directed us to the bank of elevators to her right, indicating that they were new and only the last one was operating. Alighting on the 3rd floor, past stacked sheets of wallboard and rolled cables, we entered a large brightly lighted room with desks, cabinets and closets, and women scurrying back and forth hugging folders to their breasts as in a typical office setting. One of them pointed us toward the niche where shots were being given. We had to wait our turn in a row of chairs that faced the admitting secre-

tary's desk. Other women periodically came to drop papers there and shoot the breeze, their voices low. All of them were smartly dressed with hair straight to the shoulders in current style. Many of them were noticeably shapely with obvious cleavages. A few were drop-dead beauties; one gave me a playful come hither glance.

It wasn't until a slim older figure in a pants suit who had been one of the breeze shooters, approached us and asked if we had been sent by SAGE (a local center for seniors). I said no, hospital. As I observed her more closely, I had a sudden awareness of something strange I couldn't put my finger on. Then I noticed her scarf was hiding what looked like an Adam's Apple and I knew right away: *girls don't have them!* Others passing by were likewise endowed. I nudged Arthur and whispered, 'male cross-dressers'. An entire office full! We never found out why, but when I got shots, my hunch was verified – the nurse had one too. Bizarre!

A DIVINE BLESSING

The Pope was about to go out on his balcony and greet and bless the flocks filling St. Peter's Square. Before he stepped out of the window, his cardinal in charge of protocol, cued him into what groups would be most likely to vie for his blessing. First, on the left would be mostly assorted groups of women; in the middle, assorted groups of men; and on the far right, well, a ragtag assortment of tattooed and leatherbound lesbians on motorcycles, and next to them hundreds of gay men dressed (or undressed) like they would be at their hometown gay pride parades – nipple rings, butt floss and all.

The Pope protested to his cardinal that he had no wish to greet groups whose lifestyles he did not condone. The cardinal implored him to reconsider, since that contingency made up half the crowd, and it might appear discourteous to ignore them completely. The Pope said he would consider it, and stepped out onto his balcony to great eruptions of joyful applause from the multitudes. He raised his arms out, and turning first to the women he greeted them in Italian: 'Buon giorno, Madonni.' Then he turned to the male groups in the center and greeted them: 'Buon giorno, Uomi'

The Pope finally turned to the large screamingly colorful gay throng, did a slow take, and then, with an Oy! Vey! shrug, blurted out: 'Buon giorno, ah, ah, ah..... TUTTI FRUTTI. '

ONCE MORE WITH FEELING

Two gay old things were visiting Paris for the first time. After a triple martini lunch, they toured the Louvre, agreeing to go their separate ways and meet up again at the stairs leading up to the Winged Victory. When they did, the first one, boozy from lunch, peered up at the sculpture and announced, 'See? All fairies don't fly!' They sat on the steps and compared notes, with acerbic asides. The Mona Lisa? 'A drag queen who just farted'. The Venus de Milo? 'Her mammy told her as a child if she didn't stop playing with herself, her arms would drop off'. The old 'gurls' (their spelling) sprawled back in gales of laughter, slapping their sides.

As the guards led them away, one yelled to the other, 'Did you see that nude statue of Apollo near the Venus?' 'Yeth', was the blurry answer. 'Well, (hic), did you notice that one of his testicles was a little lower than the other?' 'Yup, (hiccup), warmer, too!'

 YOU'RE SO BALD, YOU'RE BALD

The only thing I regretted as I grew older and more follically challenged was not experiencing my hair turning silver like my dad's. He had a full head of it when he died in 1991, and as the family gathered before his open casket at the funeral home, everyone, from Mom on down, marveled at how handsome he looked with it combed neatly back against the satin. I would never have such a stunning crest – at my funeral or any other time. I was bald.

I first became aware of it, or when others were, at 35. I was dressing for the wedding of my very dear friend Peggy and taking great care to be perfectly accoutered. Peg was my age and from a prominent Beekman Place family with old Dutch ancestry. She was the last of four siblings to marry, and according to her mother, about time. The wedding took place in the rambling family summer 'cottage' at Oyster Bay, Long Island. It was a bone chilling December day and the grounds and home had to be reopened. The heat and water had been turned off in September, and her mother decreed it was not to be tampered with. Their private cars had to be hooked up to a Long Island Railroad train, (The old

dowager had wanted it to take place at St. Thomas' Episcopal Church on Fifth Avenue in the City for the convenience of the invited guests (and her), with a reception at the Colony or some such.

I rode the last car with the mother's personal secretary and 4 ancient Irish maids that had been with her so long they were part of the woodwork. They had lugged on refrigerator chests that contained everything for the reception, and were a hoot to listen to on the two hour ride. Peg and her husband-to-be Bill were married in a small chapel at the edge of the property by her older brother who was an ordained clergyman. The stone interior was numbing. A small snag developed in the vestibule as the bride and one maid of honor appeared. Peggy hated the long veil and psst-ed me in the back row to come help do something with it.

The two of us hurriedly ripped it apart and swathed it about her shoulders and head like a euphoric cloud, and off she sauntered – all 6 foot 4 – down the ice cold marble aisle, dwarfing her 6 foot partner. At the reception following, warmed by cases of champagne, we joined the line to kiss the bride, and as I afterward turned from her, she interrupted the proceedings with, 'Donn Russell, you're getting BALD! Really!' She laughed and stuck an index finger on the spot at the back of my head. For that brief moment I hated her.

But only for a moment. What I really hated was the condition itself and what it presaged. Why me? Although the bald spot was no bigger than a silver dollar then, it overwhelmed my psyche. I was determined to do something drastic, like having it tattooed one dark color, but realized as it grew larger I would eventually have to increase the tattoos, and mental pictures of *that* end result sickened me.

A thoughtful theater director, whose production I was helping to get staged (by the new performing arts foundation of which I became director, set up in memory of Peggy who, with her husband and three other relatives, were killed in an air crash while returning from their honeymoon in Mexico), came to my rescue. What saved me then, and for the next decade, was stage makeup – grease paint. He suggested going to the tiny shop at the corner of 50th Street and Broadway that was then the only purveyor of theatrical supplies in the entire Times Square area.

The grandmotherly type who waited on me (who I was sure was

wearing 6 inch stiletto heels and fishnet stockings out of sight below the counter) brought forth a small white porcelain jar with French lettering in accents *grave* and *aigu* all over it. The color shade it contained was called Othello, and for the price it had to be applied very sparingly. In the words of a current hair pomade jingle – ‘a little dab’ll do yah.’ I swiped a small wet sponge across the ‘paint’ and patted it on my bald spot, then dotted it with a tissue. It was perfect. She really knew what she was doing. I grew hair long enough to cover the spot, and, *voila*. Good for 10 years.

After that, my hair began thinning rapidly on top. I tried minimizing the effect by trimming the sides very short. But then I looked bald. all over. One afternoon when out doing errands, I passed the playground of a nearby school at recess. Over the fence came a stray ball and landed in the street beside me.

‘Hey, skinhead, get our ball!!’ ‘Yeah. skinhead toss da ball!!’

I looked about, astonished at being called that for the first time..It was all right for me to criticize myself, but , others ? And a bunch of school kids? That was humbling. I called a buddy, Roger, who had worn hairpieces for many years. He said I’d get used to it and just pass it off. He *did* suggest I consider a hairpiece and in fact urged me to go with him that week. I went, and found the entire process fascinating; from the muslin ‘headplan’; to the shaping of the lace on the crown; to the ‘knotting’ of the single hairs to the lace. Ladies sat at benches in street clothes weaving the strands and chattering away in some Middle-European dialect, as if they had gathered for tea. The atmosphere was very laid back.

I went alone for the final fitting. I had requested a ‘rug’ that was not thick or showy. In fact I stipulated that the original silver dollar bare spot be incorporated, and it was, with a circle of flesh colored lace under a transparent thin veil of strands. The end result was very successful. I wore it with no inhibitions for another 15 years. (Actually, two hairpieces: one being cleaned while one was worn.)

Then came the fateful day when all that would change. It happened one August evening on Nantucket Island. A married couple, Lurelle and Hollis were visiting me for the week. We were drinking to celebrate a successful ad agency campaign that involved Hollis as the art director and me as the artist whose sculptures were photographed for ads for a Wall Street bank promotion. The series had just won a Society of New York Illustrators’ annual award, and the first magazines showing them

were hitting the stands : Time, Life, The New Yorker, Fortune, etc.

It had been raining all day. In my rented apartment in the center of town we started celebrating early, ending with a take out dinner from the French restaurant next door. About 9:30, after being cooped up all afternoon, we decided to change into shorts, don slickers and venture out barefoot for a walkabout. I remembered only that we were whooping and splashing in the puddles down the middle of the uneven cobblestone streets, and there was no apparent traffic in sight. There seldom was in Nantucket at night.

I jumped hard into a puddle and immediately slipped on one of the stones and fell down. Still laughing merrily, Hollis slogged over and grabbed me by the hair (piece), pulling me up to full standing height before letting go. Obviously he didn't know that it wasn't my own hair. That was my first thought. My second was about the damage that might have been done to my scalp? Before adjusting the hairpiece that morning, I had laid extra pieces of two-sided tape around the entire outer perimeter of the lace underneath, to keep it from getting dislodged by wind or the elements if one of us did make just such a proposal.

The top of my head felt a searing sensation. My hood had been thrown back and rain was beating down on it as well. Hollis and Lurelle continued to splash about as if nothing untoward had happened – and, if they were unaware of the hairpiece, then to them nothing had. I tried to laugh it off and pulled the hood back onto my head, ever so gently. I was suddenly cold sober. Feigning a need to go to the bathroom, I led us back home. A look in the mirror showed blood had mixed with rain and was dripping from everywhere under the piece, as if from a crown of thorns.

Using a ball of cotton soaked in rubbing alcohol, I carefully peeled the wig away from the skin. It felt like a thousand needles were jabbing it. Everywhere the tape had been was raw, skin torn away. To all intents and purposes, I'd been SCALPED. Placing medication and sterile pads loosely all over, I donned a baseball cap and returned to my guests, making some excuse or other for being in the bathroom so long. I didn't want them to know what had happened. Luckily they left, by plan, two days later and I rode my bike to the emergency room of the hospital to get my pate cleaned up and properly bandaged.

For several weeks my head felt huge, reminding me of a well-known playwright and Broadway show director of acquaintance

who was originally a medical doctor. He once did an anatomical illustration of a human body, with the sections most susceptible to intense pain rendered overly large and the parts less affected progressively smaller. The head took up half the drawing. My half.

When it was time for me to return to New York that fall, I was a changed man. I was ready to face the world, well, more or less, as I actually was. An old Saturday Evening Post cartoon came to mind. It showed the interior of a barber shop with a middle-aged customer seated and the barber adjusting a new hairpiece onto his head, the customer looking very unhappy with the results. The caption had the barber say:

'Of course it's not the real you. The real you is bald.'

I stopped wearing a hairpiece, but I had to admit, I replaced it in most cases with a hat. An *interesting* looking hat. I began a great collection, mostly straw, worn at a jaunty angle. When it was necessary to audit evening theater performances, I took the hat off just *after* the house lights dimmed. At intermission receptions I wore a uniform black cap. It took a very long time to be able to walk into the theater – or church – or down a street – completely bareheaded.

During that long period, and while waiting for those early scalp(ing) scars to disappear, I immersed myself in every aspect of BALD, from learning about how many of us walked the earth (1.4 billion in 2004) to its earliest origins. Technically called Alopecia, from the Greek '*alópax*' meaning 'fox', (because it is an animal that sheds its coat twice a year), it also derives from the old English '*balde*', meaning 'white, pale'. From earliest times bald men had been ridiculed and stigmatized. The Bible, of all places, could be especially virulent in that department. Just one example from the book of 2 Kings 2:23-24:

'He (Elisha, a prophet) went from there to Bethel: and while he was going up on the way, some youths came out of the city and jeered at him, saying. 'Go up, you baldhead (meaning 'worthless'), Go up, you baldhead!'" And he turned around and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord.'

Another from Iiaiah 3:24:

'...and it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell, there shall

be stink; and instead of a girdle, a rent; and instead of well-set hair, baldness.'

True to tell, most of the scriptural hostility to baldness was directed toward 'shaven' heads of enemies rather than naturally caused. But Literature knocked baldness incessantly too, as in this gem of a rhetorical question from 'Arabian Nights':

'Is there anything more ugly in the world than a man beardless and bald as an artichoke?'

From time immemorial those afflicted males tried to coax back some of their lost crowning glory. Every remedy imaginable had been tried: Aristotle rubbed his pate with goat piss; Hippocrates (who should have known better) used pigeon poop; ancient Egyptians, who were big on remedies for everything, fiddled around with the fat of lions, hippopotami, crocodiles, snakes and Ibises – all to no avail. Cleopatra recommended to Caesar a mixture of charred and ground mice, horse teeth, bear grease and deer. (Interestingly enough, the word 'Caesar' meant *abundant hairs*. Because of his lack of them, he became the most paranoid of all early rulers. He was supposedly the originator of the famous 'comb-over', except that instead of side to side, he combed it forward and held strands in place with a laurel wreath.)

Spider webs and saliva were also big along the Nile. But they were no match for the concoctions the so-called snake-oil salesmen of the early American West foisted off on the unsuspecting. They would go down in history as venal charlatans. To date, no touted restorative has worked. The only answer was either wearing a head covering made of something resembling real hair – Hannibal hated his baldness so much, he insisted on going into battle wearing any simulated likeness that didn't required frequent adjusting, just for show! (A recent trend of electronically planting single hairs one by one in the scalp turned out to be very painful and painstaking. And expensive. Sometimes they took, sometimes not.)

In the 17th century wigs reached their pinnacle of ostentation—immense overblown pilings of powdered curls cascading down around the face. The monarch most notable for the trend was France's Louis XIII., who went bald in his early twenties. Excessive to the point of looking ridiculous (one favorite countess

wore one depicting a sea battle, with all masts full blown), nevertheless powdered wigs were in vogue in Europe and America well into the 18th century, hence the American term 'bigwig'.

George Washington first wore a 'peruke' as a general, but later powdered his own receding hair, prompting a new relaxed trend in America. Benjamin Franklin was one of the first prominent citizens to go '*au naturel*' (unpowdered) and others followed suit, regardless of their degrees of baldness. That was likely the genesis of 'bald jokes' that have proliferated down to this day. Some vintage ones:

A very bald gentleman sat next to an elderly near-sighted lady at a formal dinner party. She inadvertently dropped her fork to the floor and as the gentleman reached far under the table to retrieve it, the top of his head was almost in her plate. She turned from talking to someone on her other side, saw his head and said, 'Oh, no melon for me, thank you.'

A young woman dancing with a balding young man, 'Look at it this way. God was good to you. He gave you one handsome face and room for another.'

*'Oh, Mother, why are the men in the front row baldheaded'
'Because they bought their tickets from scalpers, dear.'*

*Why do baldheaded men never use keys?
Because they've lost their locks.*

Who never gets his hair wet in the shower? You guessed it!

*How can a balding man avoid falling hair?
By getting out of the way.*

And my favorite 21st century contemporary :

*You're so bald that when you wear
a turtleneck, you look like a roll-on deodorant.*

All joking aside, and the reader will have to admit that I have clearly progressed from hiding it to embracing it, I wondered while writing this piece: Seriously, what does a man who is completely

bald put down on his passport or driver's license application as the color of his hair? Hm.

Back to my own recent family history: My father, as earlier indicated, kept a full head of hair all his life. My mother, who was a first generation American of Scandinavian background with no immediate family members who had lost any hair prematurely, including her father and two brothers, experienced a thinning out starting at 50. She never became bald, but wore wigs from then on throughout her life. (Beautiful lustrous white ones designed by 'Eva Gabor'.) I had one younger brother whose hair didn't begin slowly thinning until late in his 70s.

On my dad's side, his father was murdered at the age of 45 (the story is elsewhere in this book) and his last sepia showed him with ample hair. Dad's much younger brother, who was killed in the Battle of the Bulge in World War II at 36, from early photos had a full head of hair also. About those two we would never know. His mother kept all hers until death at 96. However three of his four sisters (her daughters) had important hair loss early.

His oldest sister had hair 'you could see through' for as long as I remembered. She died of cancer in her late 50s. The two younger sisters with follicular problems were older and younger. The elder was Grace (who figures prominently in an earlier story of my grandfather, and was a near twin of my father). After secretarial (early finishing) school, she studied operatic singing and sang in choirs in the Boston area. In one she met her husband who was an international importing conglomerate executive. They lived very comfortably in the suburb of Belmont Hills and summered on a farm in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

Grace's wigs were the best money could buy. Flat brown curls covered her head tightly almost like a bathing cap. No one would ever be aware they were not real. They were her helmets for doing combat with other garden club officers and bridge opponents. She was never seen publicly without one. One summer my father decided that our immediate family – he, my mother, brother and I should take an auto trip to New Hampshire expressly to see the White Mountains, and on the way stop for an afternoon visit with Grace and her husband at their small farm unannounced. When we drove past their barn on the way to the house, we passed her

husband hammering away on the roof. He waved. We waved and continued on. Dad knocked on the porch's screen door, and Grace appeared, stunned to put it mildly, wearing a plain cotton dress and a bandana.

Completely flustered, she backed away from the door and said she'd be with us shortly. There was something cooking on the stove. When she returned, it was in an afternoon dress and a wig. Over iced tea we chatted pleasant chat talk, while my brother and I nudged each other on the living room sofa and indicated her wig with our eyes. It just didn't look right. When we got up to leave she saw us to the door, where the light was stronger, and we found out why – in her haste she had put the wig on backwards and the longer back curls dangled over her forehead, while the sewn-in part began at the nape of her neck and divided the back of her head up to the crown like a zipper.

We boys barely made it back to the car doors before erupting in laughter. Our parents joined in after we had waved last goodbyes to both of them and driven off down the bend. Many years later, with her in mid-90s and near the end in a hospital bed, she kept us waiting again so that she could be 'rightfully' presented at the last on her terms. The zipper began at the forehead.

The other sister was Maddie, a completely different personality. Fastidious enough about her person as she went to work each day in a warehouse office in Boston, she preferred operating in the background of life. Understated in every way, when it came time for her to begin wearing a wig, she chose a plain brown department store knock down. It aged her in every way. She remained an old maid until she was 50, when she married a hidebound bachelor of Scotch descent, with still older hidebound mother baggage in tow. Until then the old lady was the only one who could live with his odiferous cigars and loud hacking. Now Maddie got to live and care for both. It was a stifling – and smelly – *ménage a trois*.

But, Maddie being Maddie, took it all in stride, and when the 2 Scots died off, she came into her own, financially and freely. She drove needy seniors to doctor appointments, taught a Sunday school class of mostly indigent often pregnant teenagers of color, gave money to great causes. She took care of sister Grace when she became widowed and crippled with arthritis. But she would not buy better wigs for herself. Thought it was frivolous and indulgent.

That was, until her sister-in-law (my mother with the beautiful wavy white Gabor), sent her a catalog and circled the wig she thought would suit Maddie best. She became hooked, even to deem price was no object. When it arrived, she invited Mother (and me also, since I was visiting from New York) for lunch, saying she wouldn't open the box until we saw it. We drove to her Medford Hillside bungalow that had been freshly fumigated and repainted throughout – not a cigar band or Edinburgh ashtray anywhere – and after lunch, sat at the dining room table with coffee and sherry while she fetched the hatbox from the closet.

When she came back and set it before us, she declared that first of all she would remove the wig she had on. It was necessary to warn us since we'd never seen her without it. Six overlapping concentric rows of brown synthetic hair circled up smaller to the little tuft at the top – the rows could be counted – and all of it glued to a stiff form of muslin. Must have been stifling in summer, I thought. She removed two hairpins from the back and lifted it off. It was a good thing she had forewarned us, because the shock of seeing her almost totally bald, except for a few loose strands in back that were curled tight to receive the pins that anchored the wig, was astonishing. I got a sudden flashback of newsreels showing young women in wartime, heads shaven, convicted of sleeping with the enemy, being herded down the streets of Paris in filthy overcoats past angry mobs hurling epithets and stones.

Luckily that lasted only a moment, because Maddie, eager to see her new purchase, was already undoing the package. When she tore away the tissue paper and lifted out the hairpiece in all its shiny newness, we both yelled 'Brava', hoisting our sherry glasses. She looked it over quizzically (actually trying to find the front) and then, with it perched on one fist and three or four pale strands of her own held out in the other to meet it, asked earnestly, 'Is it a match?'

Well, it might have been the situation, or maybe the sherry, but my mother and I went into convulsions of laughter. The thought of us trying to test an entire wig by several withered hairs on her head was like judging the forest by the dead trees. We said of course it was a match and urged her to go try it on for us. Wary, after our unexpected outburst, she instead carefully packed the wig away, saying she might try playing with it later. The only time I recalled ever seeing it on her again was 12 years later – at her funeral.

Katherine was a dear older friend who had lost all her hair as a young girl to a condition called *alopecia areata universalis*, that must have been devastating at that age. She even had no eyelashes or eyebrows. However, she managed to mature quite normally – if normal meant going to the best schools, marrying into Pittsburgh Steel and having a home off Harvard Square, another in Florida and summer places on Nantucket Island. When I got to know her there in her dotage, she and her husband Edgar were long settled in one of their summer homes on a bluff in town overlooking Nantucket Harbor. Both tall, she stood erect, he stooped slightly.

She painted '*faux primitif*' ((her term) paintings, mostly of her resident cats. Edgar had never worked in his life, but busied himself with ham radio messages to other far flung enthusiasts in his aerie 3 floors above the genteel seediness of the rest of the house. Not that it wasn't fascinating. They had become Quakers and during World War II, to do their 'pacifist' duty, they toured to different parts of the country by car with a small menagerie of pets, writing human interest stories on how local communities handled the war effort, and then dispatching them to newspapers in the East, using the pets' names as bylines.

Their travels netted them strange trophies from all over that they had mounted and catalogued as in a museum. They wrote a definitive early history of Nantucket lightship baskets and scrimshaw, and displayed precious originals in the bay windows. The parlor rugs were threadbare and chairs covered with spreads

Katherine had overcome the 'weird' look of *alopecia* in middle age with a long-haired wig containing streaked grey tones. She combed it back into a loose bun at the back, leaving single strands hanging unkempt on the sides that she deftly lifted and tucked in with the rest as she talked. It was a very effective ploy that fooled almost everybody. What didn't fool many was the dark liner that was drawn around the edges of her eyelids, Cleopatra style, in lieu of eye lashes and the eyebrows she stenciled on that didn't always match. Some days she walked around with one raised in perpetual surprise, and on others both low and glowering.

Generous in many ways, mean spirited in others, she wasn't fond of stupidity, and although she employed a series of colored cooks, she could be biting about the race generally. A small chapel grounds near me, that was said to be one of the earliest Negro

meeting places in America, was being ‘excavated’ by University of Florida archaeology students one day as we drove past. We slowed to watch them out the car windows. She scrutinized the dig closely, then remarked, ‘Hmph. All they’re going to find are old chicken bones and watermelon rinds.’

Edgar, who wore a suit jacket or cardigan sweater even in the hottest weather, talked little and snoozed often. He’d nod off while we were discussing anything. After a visit I could never remember what his voice sounded like. They entertained little, considering themselves a cut above the run-of-the-mill mindless butterflies that flitted about the Yacht Club. But she liked ‘the boys’ as she called us and a few other select male couples, and sometimes treated us to high tea (English style) of a late Saturday evening, knowing we would appreciate its elegance.

On just such an occasion Arthur and I were paired with friends Peter and Paul who ran the guest house across the street. It was stiflingly hot and to make matters worse, there was no electricity in the medium size dining room – by design. Eight wall sconces with six candles burning in each gave off a flattering glow, but heated things up so badly that we ‘boys’ had to remove our jackets by mid-course. We had each had a small glass of sherry beforehand, which didn’t help.

Arthur and Paul were seated across from Peter and me on the long side of the table. Katherine sat at the buffet end and Edgar in a Windsor armchair near the kitchen door. Before serving, Katherine rang her little bell for Josephine, her present and longest lasting cook. Josephine came through the swinging door, a medium color between the tan and umber of a uniform that reminded me of the Horn and Hardart cafeteria days in old New York. Her grey hair was bristle short. Josephine, Katherine explained, was an excellent singer and gave concerts at the Baptist Church off Main Street. In place of a blessing, she would give us an *a capella* rendering of The Lord’s Prayer. ‘Commence, Josephine.’

Josephine, a slim smiling lady, folded her hands at the waist in true soloist stance and sang, ‘Our Father, which art in heaven....’

♪ ♪
 ♪ ah ♪ ♪ ah ♪

then softly added ♪ ah ah ♪, ♪ ah ah ♪, the treble piano background, before continuing, ‘Hallowed be Thy name..’, and so on. She was singing her own accompaniment as well. Amazing!

We didn't know whether to bow our heads or watch her. Looking to Katherine didn't help because she had her face lifted heavenward, eyes closed rapturously, fingers tapping the tablecloth; Edgar, bent forward, also with eyes closed – was about to nod off.

Josephine had a lovely pure voice that resounded easily through the dining room and two adjoining parlors. But the added *ah ah ah's* between the composer Malotte's own phrases became, if anything, distracting and increasingly ludicrous. I sneaked a peek at Peter beside me and he did the same at me. We kicked under the table and almost guffawed aloud. I held my napkin over my mouth as if to ward off a sneeze and left it there. I noticed Arthur and Paul across the table were giving each other sidelong glances too, and on the next *ah's*, would probably have erupted.

But the recital was cut short when Josephine smelled something burning in the kitchen and fled. Katherine came back down to earth, tucked the usual errant hairs back into her wig and snapped open her napkin. The high tea progressed in fine manner. Edgar even managed to stay awake until the 'trifle' course and demitasse. No longer needed, Josephine had meanwhile changed into her 'street' clothes, and paused on her way out to bid us all a good night. We hardly recognized her. She had on a shiny satin suit with matching high heeled shoes, white gloves, a white purse, and as if to top it all off, a spiffy auburn wig. 'Later, guys,' she cooed.

Coda: The sight of bald men on TV made me cringe. They looked like clowns without makeup. I once participated in a TV news segment touting a new cancer radiation procedure. I was the old treatment. To keep the shine off my pate required a dulling powder and umbrella lighting, but I thought I still looked loutish. The only time I was pleased with my predicament was one wintry day in 2010 when, in parka and ski cap, I was stopped in my Greenwich Village neighborhood by 3 plain clothes cops, who asked my name and address and how long I'd lived there. One pulled out a head shot of a man who bore a remarkable resemblance to me, except for one important detail. As I was being told to follow them to headquarters, I tore off my cap, and it became obvious – the guy pictured had a crop of real hair. They looked at him again, then me, and beat it across Sheridan Square before I could ask, 'Wha's up?' I subsequently treated my affliction with more respect.



THAT ELUSIVE ‘15 MINUTES OF FAME’

The routine, rather humdrum midweek schedule of running a small print gallery on Old South Wharf on Nantucket Island was suddenly broken by that phone call from Betsy at the Artists Association. It was a perfect sunny afternoon in mid-June, 1989 – dreamy, soporific, out-of-body. Anyone with any sense was already beaching or surfing along the far reaches of the coast, not in town picking out prints for the parlor. Ripples of the incoming harbor tide lapped the hulls of yachts tied up to the pilings on the water side of my gallery. Their insistent beat lulled me as I sat in my canvas chair under the locust in the inner courtyard.

I rose out of my stupor on the third ring and ran inside to answer. Betsy’s voice was as matter-of-fact as the message. She had just got a call from the headquarters of WCVB TV Boston, talking to someone named Karen Shiffman who was a producer of the daily morning ‘Good Day!’ show. They planned to do a one hour special called ‘4th of July on Nantucket’ to be aired on that upcoming holiday with the following format:

After an initial walkabout downtown narrated by the program’s star host Ted Reinstein, he would then, in four more or less equal segments of 15 minutes each, introduce and interview, in turn, the young sea captain of a vintage sailing vessel on a cruise around the harbor, a real estate agent on a motor tour of the, then, million dollar summer homes available around the island (in 1989 there were only a handful, but within a decade there were considerably more at considerably higher prices), next a representative artist in

the artist's studio or gallery, and lastly, a locally known chef and food writer at a traditional clambake on the sands of Jetties Beach.

Betsy, the association director, indicated she wished me to be the representative artist. Was I willing? Able? Interested? Of course! Overexposure was hardly ever an artist's concern. I faxed copies of appropriate subjects to Boston for consideration, then returned to the humdrum to wait for a reply.

Old South Wharf was anything but humdrum evenings and weekends. It was enjoying what some remembered as its heyday of artistic activity that would last through the '90s. Small galleries and shops, once fishermen's shanties, lined both sides of the wharf facing each other across a central courtyard. At night their bright windows and doorways collectively anchored the scattered lights of the moored ships all over the harbor like glowing hemlines.

Being one of the first innovators at turning the long central courtyard into a celebration of sight and sound, I became known as the 'Mayor of Old South Wharf'. But every artist and artisan shared in making it a 'must' place to gather. There were evening Midsummer Strolls, when we did arts and crafts demonstrations. I for one printed a small silkscreen each time to the ah's of kids who were also gobbling up the refreshments laid out on card tables in front of each shanty, picking and choosing all the way down on one side and back up the other. There were never leftovers.

Live entertainment over time included folk singers, harpists, fiddlers, classical guitarists and one time, (by serendipity, because they were just passing through) a troupe of male Morris dancers in costumes, who stole all the strollers' attention to mid-court with their intertwining dance steps and high fluttering handheld kerchiefs – so much so in fact that they drained all interest away from our exhibits. (It was agreed at the next ad hoc meeting under my tree to bar such scene stealing distractions in the future.)

Occasionally we ran into foul weather, that, on an island in the Atlantic, could be fickle as fate. The sunny morning of one Stroll a small group of us blew up multicolored balloons and hung them all over my spreading tree. When we finished it looked like it had begot strange fruit indeed, all different shapes and sizes, but quite festive. That night when we returned to set up for the event, a dense fog had passed through and shriveled all the balloons into what looked like droopy discarded condoms. That same occasion, strings of fish lights that we had carefully draped across from roof

to roof, had sunk so low that youngsters were using them for jump ropes and adults had to bend over double to get under them.

Nantucket traditionally held a 'Christmas Stroll' the early part of every December, but the strolling was usually limited to Main Street and immediate environs. One year, as 'mayor' of Old South Wharf, I convinced the gallery and shop owners to re-open for the long weekend event. A few of the shanties had potbellied stoves, (unused for a century), but most were heatless and drafty. The other shopkeepers were good sports and participated, and it was even decided to advertise in advance and hold a series of raffles, one in front of each doorway, offering items within as prizes.

I volunteered to walk up and down Main Street handing out free raffle tickets. I wore a red plaid poncho my mother had made from horse blanket material she and my father had bought on a trip to northern Maine many years earlier, a stovepipe hat adorned with a wreath band and six (artificially) lit candles on top, black riding boots and my great grandfather's antique gold-headed cane. On my chest was pinned a hand-lettered badge with streamers announcing my unofficial title. The tourists had a field day snapping photos.

No one could remember an earlier winter weekend like that one turned out to be. The weather alternated from rain to sleet to snow to sunshine and back again. The temperature hovered around freezing and the unrelenting northeast wind was gale force. I handed out the tickets and went back to my shanty, where buddy Arthur was holding down the fort. He had draped plastic sheeting on all the walls and brought a small electric area heater to keep his feet warm under the desk. We stamped and stomped until the time appointed to give away prizes.

Since I had got colleagues into the mess, they insisted I be the one doing the honors in each doorway. I walked out of our shop into a crowd of hundreds of frozen but eager faces and got a round of mitten-muffled applause as I made my way to the front of the wharf and began picking numbers out of my hat. Happy recipients held their prizes up for all to see – small paintings, scrimshaw, handwoven scarves. There was much laughing and shouting. When we arrived in a great body to where my shanty stood, the crowd, seeing that there was only one more shop after it, began thinning out. Arthur appeared at the doorway with a small framed print of mine wrapped in brown paper. The lady who won it tore open the wrapping and shouted, 'I already have this one on my wall!'



‘Mayor’ Old South Wharf Christmas Stroll, Nantucket 1992



'Mayor' Midsummer Stroll, Old South Wharf 1998

Others said they'd gladly take it. I assured her of a later exchange.

To our amazement, however, within minutes after the raffle ended, the throng disappeared as if by magic. Other shop owners figured on at least another hour or two of possible sales, but none had any. Not one! I was reviled, chagrined and, needless to say, never brought up the subject again.

But back to the TV shoot, the show's producer Karen Shiffman called in two days and gave the project a go-ahead. Disappointed that it couldn't be shot at my Old South Wharf gallery because of the limited space and difficulty of getting sound trucks and generator equipment out there, she agreed my segment should be filmed at my in-town studio set in a much photographed garden.

All the glass had to be removed from the framed pieces on the walls, and then the artwork returned to the frames, she ordered. The studio should look clean but untidy, some works-in-progress evident. Have a new print ready to be finished on air. Limit the furniture to what was needed. Be casually dressed in neutral colors. Look pleasant. Oh, and how about having a few wharf stories to relate as fillers.

- Old South Wharf stories were my stock in trade as the 'mayor'. The most interesting ones occurred in the 1980s for some reason. It was a time when celebrities of all sorts visited the island, either as house guests or off sailing vessels. The earliest remembered was when new screen idol William Hurt was dropped off at the wharf by his sailing brothers in the summer of 1981. He knew the young woman who sold Greek widows' slips (authentic and beautifully embroidered cotton) in the shop across from mine, but found she had gone off the Nova Scotia or some such place on someone's boat, leaving no forwarding address. He was wet and smelly from several weeks on the briny with his sibs and approached my lair to ask if there was a place to shower and clean up before catching a cab to the airport to return to New York. I gave him my key to the Men's next door, and told him he could change clothes in my gallery afterwards by latching the doors and pulling down the shades on the inside.

When he finished and reopened my doors I invited him to sit a spell in one of my canvas chairs. He did, and he learned that I knew of him before his Hollywood fame. My performing arts foundation had sponsored the first play in which he appeared in Greenwich Village, where he was 'discovered' by Hollywood.

When my young female colleagues found that out, they all wanted to stand on the very spot where he got dressed (I faked the exact location since I didn't see him) and they cooed and rubbed themselves up and down in a few moments of heat, then left. When word spread, more arrived the next day to perform the same ritual.

- Greta ('I want to be alone') Garbo showed up several times in the '80s. We were told she was a house guest of one of the backers of the outdoor restaurant further down the wharf. She had her own ritual, as we did when she was spotted. She always wore a head scarf and large dark glasses and waited outside a gallery until it was emptied of browsers. Then she'd enter while her two constant body guards barred each doorway until she had checked all the contents and was ready to move on..(It was a known fact among all of us that celebrities *never, ever* bought anything.) Our ritual after she left was to have the shopkeeper in that first gallery run around on the water side to the next shanty and stage-whisper that Garbo was coming, then that one did the same to the next, so that by the time she'd reach each shop, we acted *blasé* and barely noticed her. Some said her face was like a prune, but I honestly never looked that closely. Needless to say, she never spoke

- A short handsome celeb type who seemed to be trying to sound like Cary Grant, took a fancy to a standing female sculpture in one of our colleagues' wharf studios, and asked if it could be delivered to his yacht out near the end so he could see how it fit. The sculptor obliged immediately with the help of a neighboring artist. When they found the right craft and were about to haul the piece on board, the sculptor made the mistake of asking the fellow, 'Say, aren't you that old movie star?' (He meant 'long-time') The Cary Grant inflections got more pronounced as Tony Curtis spit out the words, 'I'm not THAT old, and you can take back that – *thing* – immediately!'

- Dustin Hoffman showed up at a Midsummer Stroll with his two 'second' generation kids, walked through my gallery to the courtyard and plunked down in my canvas chair, fascinated by how quickly his youngsters could down a bowl full of jujubes. Then they moved on. My foundation backed his first stage appearance, *Harry, Noon and Night* at American Place Theatre, and the last time I'd talked to him was on March 6, 1971, on the sidewalk outside his apartment on 11th Street in Greenwich Village that had just been rocked by a blast next door where a radical

underground group called the Weathermen had a surreptitious bomb-making factory in the basement of one of the member's family brownstone, and one went off. I was passing by on my bicycle when it happened and just as Hoffman dashed out.

- One of the loveliest sights on the wharf was in late summer of 1981 when Princess Grace (Kelly) and Prince Rainier of Monaco strolled by in Bermuda shorts and sandals. She looked radiant, as a former movie star should. However, spoiling the effect, were bodyguards fanning out from them all around in ominous navy blue suits, white shirts and maroon ties. Sad to say, it may have been one of the last times America caught a glimpse of her, because only a year later she was killed in an auto accident off a cliff in their little principality.

- By far the most bizarre celebrity sighting took place on a foggy fall day when the summer visitors and many of the shop keepers had left, some time in the mid-80s. There was a vicious nor'east wind whipping down the length of the courtyard making a loud hissing noise. I was the only one seated out in it, daydreaming and oblivious to the weather. Two male figures, arm in arm, appeared out of the fog from the yacht-mooring end of the wharf. They were in suits and ties. But the interesting thing was they had no shadows. Neither did any of the retinue following them, of state police, local authorities, and a lone dog. It was as if they were floating by. When the two front figures passed me, I thought one's profile looked like comedian Bob Hope's, skeet nose and all. The other more portly one looked vaguely familiar too. They had their heads together and were laughing, but no words could be heard above the wind.

The uniformed figures bringing up the rear were more formal looking in their uniforms and visors. They also could not be heard. None of them gazed over at me as they faded into the fog again. It was like a dream sequence in some surreal Italian movie. I didn't get to know anything until I walked into town for lunch. There on a street corner was a small bunch of locals getting autographs from former President Richard Nixon and his bosom buddy at the time, Porfirio Rubirosa, the notorious Dominican playboy. I chose not to stop, but found out at lunch they were off Rubirosa's yacht and were not allowed to stay overnight on island for security reasons. I could have suggested a few others for the villain-turned-superstar, but kept my own counsel, finished lunch and had a rich dessert.

I figured those were enough 'fill in' background stories to keep in reserve for the taping. Ms. Shiffman let me know that on June 20, she, the show's director and the interviewer were coming to the island to do a 'walkaround', deciding every shot and segue that would be filmed the following day with full crew and sound trucks about 3pm, or as soon as the preceding section with the sea captain was 'in the can'. By agreement I met the triumvirate in the parking lot near where their boat docked on Straight Wharf and drove them to my midtown studio.

Karen Shiffman was a small, thin, nervous young woman in loose jeans and kinkily teased long black hair that she tossed about as she spoke. Her voice was loud and authoritative. I sensed she had little sense of humor or patience with fools. The film's director, with the midriff bulge over Hawaiian print shorts, was Dick Puttkamer. He also had long black hair combed back into a messy pony tail, but his demeanor was much more laid back. His raucous laugh was the insinuating dirty kind redolent of half empty late night bars. He was probably in his mid-forties.

The obvious star attraction of the trio was Ted Reinstein, who would be the on-film interviewer and commentator. Like all handsome young people, he wore his attractiveness with casual ease and the awareness of always being stared at. His toothy smile made the onlooker feel more attractive in its presence. He wore a pectoral hugging blue polo shirt and suntan trousers, an outfit he would be seen in all the sequences, with the shirt replaced when sweat-wet.

The three of them found my garden a visual delight and Puttkamer thought it would be a great place for Reinstein to walk through on the way to the studio porch. The three worked it out on graph paper, seated on a bench under the large umbrella. Then it was on to the studio, that they found cramped and, aside from the skylight, ill lit. Karen made a note for more area lighting. Going up the narrow stairs to the loft would be impossible for heavy cameras, and she didn't like the idea of hand held ones – too jerky. More notes were made.

The framed works without glass hanging on the walls upstairs and down met her approval. It was decided the bulk of the interview would be held upstairs with Reinstein perched on a long counter beside me, with one rotating camera in the center of the room panning from us to the particular works discussed. Two hand held cameras would be used for the corners. Larger distant

paintings would be videotaped separately later for inclusion.

Back downstairs and into the rear printing room presented the biggest problem. The space was cramped and in order to show me actually 'pulling' a finished print from under the lifted screen, it required a cameraman up in the rafters shooting down on the whole procedure, and another one to hold him there. Then there had to be a second camera just behind my right shoulder pointed down into the well of the screen as I worked. (An extra sponging of makeup was needed on the back of my neck)

Measurements for cables were made of the length of the garden and interiors, and more up the street and around the corner to where one of the generator trucks had to be parked out of earshot since it made so much noise. Karen finished her notes, and the three of them thanked me and told me to take it easy until their return two days hence. I drove them back downtown to where they were to meet up with the next 'act': a tour of available million dollar homes all over the island by a seasoned real estate agent.

The shooting day dawned muggy, hot and humid, and by the time the entire crew and trucks arrived late, about 4, it was more so. But the experienced crew got the sound truck parked in my driveway and the generator on a cross street, and all the cables hooked up and snaking down the edge of my garden path quickly. Several upstairs windows had to be removed to fit equipment in, but they handled it all with ease. A makeup man started working on Ted and me under the big umbrella so we could partake of the slightest breeze wafting across the yard. We were told to relax and not do anything physical to ruin the paint job, so we remained where we were and watched the scenario unfold.

Ted was a very personable fellow with a resonant voice, who had started his career just three blocks away from my Village studio, at New York University. He had his own show on the network and also participated in its news broadcasts. (He subsequently became a producer as well.) He had never visited the island before and was fascinated with the amount of amenities it offered. Were the beaches really that great? Was there surfing?

Not only was the answer yes to both, but I was able to fill him in on a little known secret that some islanders didn't even know about: a nudist colony, remotely nestled below a ridge of high

dune grass along the south shore called Teacher's Beach. It was not shown on any maps, but was one of the quietest and most restful areas of Nantucket. No volley ball, no Frisbees. No little kids. Just adults lolling about like beached seals – some even resembling them. I spent every hour I could get away from the gallery there and in the dunes above it.

I remembered an incident, circa 1980, that I knew Ted would enjoy: Massachusetts, indeed all New England, had periodic crackdowns on nude bathing along the coasts. One day when I lay prone with the rest of the seals, someone further down the beach gave one sharp bleep on a whistle – a warning signal that the state police were roaming the immediate vicinity. Some denizens covered their privates, others rolled over. I sat up to watch one of the funniest scenes I ever encountered. From a distance, two men, one tall, one short, approached along the water's edge. When they came closer, it was apparent they were bareheaded and naked, but still wearing their heavy black cop shoes, black lisle socks rolled down over the ankles, and green aviator sunglasses. Each carried a paper shopping bag with what must have been the rest of the uniform in it. They sauntered along chatting to each other as if it were perfectly natural, but all the while scanning the recumbent population, which was atwitter under wraps.

The odd couple went a few hundred yards beyond the last 'bather', then turned around and retraced their steps. As they passed, I noticed that their exposed buttocks – that had probably not seen broad daylight since they were born – were turning rosy red, and surmised they had foregone suntan lotion also. When they were well out of earshot, a fellow on a nearby towel said he was sorry one hadn't accosted him so he could ask. 'Doesn't your badge have to be prominently pinned to your chest at all times?'

Because of the time element and the fact that they were running late, director Dick decreed that the climactic finishing of a print in the work room was the most important sequence and therefore should be got out of the way first. Ted and I were told to go to the top of the stairs and start down as if heading for that area.. We did so – in three takes – and entered the work room to see the head cameraman huddled high in the rafters with a large camera pointed downward and an aide balancing both from a tall ladder. Their t-shirts hung limply and brows glistened.

With me bent over the flat screen and Ted opposite handing me the ink pot and squeegee, it was necessary to get both of us in the overhead shot or it wouldn't make any sense. That took some doing and was helped by raising the left side of the base up so I was printing on a slant, but it looked as if it was flat on the table. Karen and Dick were by that time back inside the sound truck parked in the driveway. I got a peek inside before our makeup session. It was like the inside of a small space capsule. There was a lighted console with innumerable blinking knobs and levers and 3 swivel chairs in front of it. Beyond that were 9 or 10 small monitor screens on the wall, all crackling with static at the moment. More lit knobs were within reach on the ceiling, and ominous looking shafts rose out of the heavily carpeted floor. They would remain there throughout the filming and communicate via the 'walkman' who was the one actually telling us what to do. And, lucky for them, it was air-conditioned!

The printing went as planned and needed no re-doing. I pulled the print out from under the screen, held it up, and pronounced it finished. Voila! was Ted's response. As directed, we shook hands, said we were pleased to have shared the day with each other and I bade him a quick return to the island. I saw him out onto the porch and waved goodbye. 'Cut,' said the walkman. 'Print it.'

Ted and I were rejoined immediately in the main gallery to meet again 'for the first time' before cameras inside the porch door and discuss the artwork on surrounding walls. We were then filmed ascending the stairs to the loft. Another cameraman was at the ready above as we neared the top landing. We each had one ankle tied with green string that the walkman held and manipulated like a puppeteer, gently tugging us in tandem toward the bench on which we would perch for the 'serious discussion' of my art.

While Ted questioned and I answered, I was able to weave some earlier mentioned anecdotes into a discourse on Old South Wharf and its importance as a cultural and social entity. Brief cuts were called for from the sound truck, so that an aide with a damp sponge could gently pat our faces to keep perspiration from spoiling our looks. Ted's blue polo shirt was changed twice, but an inner t-shirt absorbed sweat under my green smock and didn't show dark. My 'Nantucket Red' (pink) cap kept my pate blotted. The crew swirling around us seemed to be melting like Little Black Sambo. But when our discussion was over, Ted and I

were pulled by the walkman directly toward the big central camera as if we were leaving through it, and we were able to go downstairs and out to sit in the considerably cooler realm of the garden. The upstairs crew, however, had to remain and take close-ups of all the paintings that had just been discussed.

By that time it was well after 7pm and the light was fading in the garden. Since that was supposed to be the lead-in to the afternoon visit, it presented something of a dilemma. The head cameraman joined Karen and Dick in the sound truck (which they were reluctant to leave, of course). They agreed that klieg lights had to be brought in from the generator truck up on the other street, along with high knock-down metal armatures. Everyone pitched in and lugged them down. I offered to help, but was politely refused. I wasn't union.

When they were all set up, the garden was lit like a little league softball stadium. It was the only bit in the finished film that looked phony. The yellow flowers were greenish, the reds were brownish, the trees looked black. Anyway, preceded by a guy with a handheld camera, (walking backwards, guided by the walkman's green string), Ted started down the garden path, remarking on its loveliness in the sunlight, then onto the porch and knocked on the door. Luckily (as planned), I was inside to welcome him. 'Donn Russell, I presume,' he smiled. It had taken almost 7 hours for him to say that line. It seemed as long and exhausting as it took Stanley to say it to Livingston.

Tuesday, the 4th of July was a beautiful, cool, breezy day, entirely unlike the stifling weather in mid-June when the taping occurred. In fact it was hard to believe it, not that, was the middle of summer. At Mary Beth's suggestion, seconded by Jack, 14 of my most stalwart colleagues converged on our living room about 8:30 a.m. with takeout breakfast buns, fruit and wine, and settled into comfortable positions around the TV set. The GOOD DAY! SHOW ON NANTUCKET Special was being aired starting at 9. As we sat and lolled around munching, David, or maybe Ray, said I should go upstairs and change into the outfit I wore during the filming. I complied. When I got back downstairs, the endless array of commercials was just ending. At the first sight of the sloop rounding Brant Point that began the show, everyone jockeyed for best viewing positions:



Photograph by Philip E. Damico



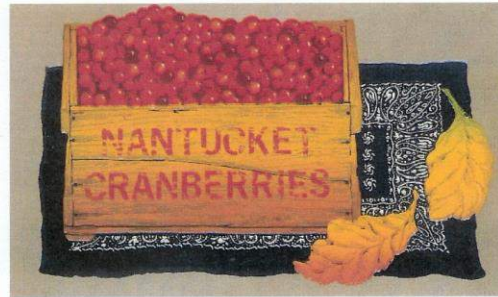
Photography by Terry Pommert

The Garden Leading Up to the Donn Russell Studio July 4, 1989

*IT'S
THE
BERRIES*



Hand pulled screen
prints used on the
Good Day Show -
'4th OF JULY ON
NANTUCKET'
TV 5 9a.m. 1989
Introducing each
15 minute segment
of activity



yo, Terry, sit down! QUIET! Sh-h-h Jack
look, this is it listen up Ray
sit still, Barbara Bill, move your head
QUIET Carol, please sit still
the program is on, Leslie
Down in front, MaryClair You too, Jon
Greg, get a shot of all of us QUIET!
Arthur. Where's Arthur?

Too scared to join the mob scene, he'd crouched silently up on the stairs, staring at the TV with wide owl eyes. The ads ended. Music.

Ted Reinstein strolled into view on lower Main Street in his ubiquitous blue shirt and dazzling smile, and invited us to join him on a stroll up the cobblestones of Nantucket. The introductory segues into each of the 4 episodes were still photos of my wild berry prints, beginning with :

Strawberries.

Ted cruised around the harbor in the old sloop alongside its young captain who filled him in on the historic whaling era significance of the harbor. (Only we locals knew that it was just going in circles, because Brant Point Lighthouse reappeared in the background periodically).

Blueberries.

Ted climbed into the real estate fellow's vehicle for a tour of great million-dollar houses. (It later needed to be re-shot because the guy got overly zealous in his pitch and distorted figures blatantly.) The neatest touch was when they ended up at a rundown shack in a field, with a rusted outdoor grill in front. Ted figured it was just what he could afford, but now he'd have to buy some art to fill it. And he knew exactly where to go!

Blackberries.

When he started walking down my brick path, everyone in the room applauded, spilling crumbs all over the Orientals. When the porch door opened and there I was, they jumped up and shouted like teenagers (we were all 50 plus!) Then they grew silent and paid attention to the entire episode until I waved goodbye to Ted. Dave ran to the kitchen and brought back a black laundry marker so each of them could leave a note on my green smock along with a kiss and a hug. I saved it in tissue paper along with the pink cap. During all of it Arthur remained squatted on the stairs with tears in his eyes – I hoped with joy.

Cranberries.

The last segment, of a holiday clambake at the beach was barely glanced at amidst the excitement. They had all seen what they came for and were anxious to re-open their own shanties on Old South Wharf for what proved be another humdrum Tuesday. Producer Karen sent me a tape of the show several weeks later, thankfully with only black intervals for commercials between episodes, then white numbers counting down to the next. Repeat, thankfully, since I didn't think anyone else noticed, but the ad just before my 15 minutes of fame had been one for rat poison. Honest.

Happily, the aftermath of my friends' merriment and accolades lingered long. Even Judi's parting salvo cracked me up again in replay: 'Now aren't you glad you took my advice two years ago and had those rotten teeth of yours capped? See? You never know!' You never do.

Playing back Karen's tape, I was struck for the first time by the strummed background music, as strangely haunting and distant as the far-away isle itself. Leaving it to others to judge the merits of the show, I found that, in spite of the tedium between takes, the flubbing and repeating of lines, the overpowering heat, it was for the most part a highly rewarding experience in which to take pride.

The true impact of my TV appearance was felt the next weekend when the ferries disgorged eager visitors, many of whom made their way immediately past two wharves to Old South and my shanty. Since time was of the essence, they pawed through stacks of matted reproductions, chose one or more, dropped money on the counter, had me autograph the backs and dashed off, saying they'd seen the show and loved the work. In a day the print bins had been nearly decimated. For the next week or two money continued to roll in. Then slowly the rush subsided and humdrum set in, but by then wasn't my reputation made? Well, not entirely.

Crossing lower Main Street some time later I passed a group whose front man spied me and asked if I was the guy he'd seen on TV a couple weeks ago. Assured that it was, he turned to the others and yelled, 'Hey, I seen this guy on Evening Magazine. It was a whole program about horses, 'member?' He gave my shoulder a thump. 'Cool job man!'

And off they went, leaving me to wonder, if one spent an entire lifetime trying to gain a certain recognition, would it still be possible to become famous for all the wrong reasons?



Photo: Maggie Meredith

DONN

73

ARTHUR

89

2002: Celebrating 50 Years of Companionship,
Humor and High Adventure...And Still Counting

*Dieja lena que quemar
Diejo vino que beber
Diejo amigo a quien hablar
Diejo libro que leer**

*A classic Spanish toast, carved into the fireplace mantle at the Santa Prisca Hotel in Taxco, Mexico, where we often stayed. It was its motto and we made it ours. Translation: Old book to read; Old wine to drink; Old friend with whom to talk.

Postlude



The Author at 81 August 2010

I was a confirmed tale spinner, always ready for any situation with a relative story of my own novel experiences or one in which I might be partially involved. I had a lifetime supply, and could rattle one off at the drop of a hat (my own). I was also a performer of sorts, pleased when they were enjoyed by others, even more so when I overheard people reacting to someone else's anecdotes by saying, 'Now that sounds like a Donn Russell story' (the true worth of a storyteller). A year ago when I turned 80, I worried that there might soon become a time when I could no longer remember, or worse, care about, the stories anymore, and felt an urgent need to write them down. A kind of legacy.

So in summer 2009 I began culling random bits of information from notes saved, probably, for just such a purpose 'someday'. I pored over my early sketchbooks and photos for inspiration, and remembered that my buddy Arthur, still remarkably alive and vital at 97, had fortunately kept detailed diaries of all our travels. They created the footprints for the stories. Internet sources offered history and background color to flesh them out. The urgency, however, was to finish the book so that Arthur could read it – now. I worked on it all through the winter, and completed it in the month above, with dear friends Lloyd and Elizabeth Sherwood proof reading the manuscript. He read it in September.

As I progressed, I felt that I, too, could benefit by the printed page. It might be that in time I would have to be read to, and what better joy than to have one's own work among the selections to draw from. I have written other books, but recalling all that personal involvement gave me a greater feeling of fulfillment and closure. It was a pleasure to visit my past.

Nantucket Island, September 2010



Photo: Carol Muehling

Arthur's 98th birthday March 19, 2011 (with Donn)
Greenwich Village, New York City

